

BRITAIN'S BEST-SELLING MOUNTAIN BIKE MAGAZINE

# Mountain Biking UK®

SUMMER 2015  
ISSUE 318

GET SET FOR  
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Best ways to ride to work  
15 trail shorts tested  
Biking holiday ideas

**BIG VALUE  
DOWNHILL  
BIKES TEST**

4 AFFORDABLE  
RACE-READY RIGS

NEW ROUTES

**BEST PLACES  
TO RIDE NOW!**  
North Wales, Wiltshire,  
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THE BIG EVENTS

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NEW RIDERS!

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We look forward to hearing from you soon.



### EDITOR'S LETTER

## Back to basics – it's the best way to improve



**It doesn't matter** what your area of interest is, if you haven't got the basic skills dialled in then you're always going to struggle to get significantly better at what you love to do. Which is why, as we head into the heart of summer, we're kicking off our new five-part technique series – The Fundamentals. Put together by our good friends and expert mountain biking coaches at Pro Ride Guides, this is a progressive series which aims to help new riders (of which we know there are many out there) really understand why the basic skills are so important and how to execute them effectively.

But it's not just for the newbies. We know plenty of experienced riders who've benefitted from going back over their skills and ironing out their bad habits to quicken their progress to an improved level of riding. So wherever you consider yourself to be on that scale, why not turn to page 148 and see what you can take away to the trails next time you're out on these long summer days? We're pretty confident that you'll end up enjoying your riding even more than before.

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Danny Walter MBUK Editor

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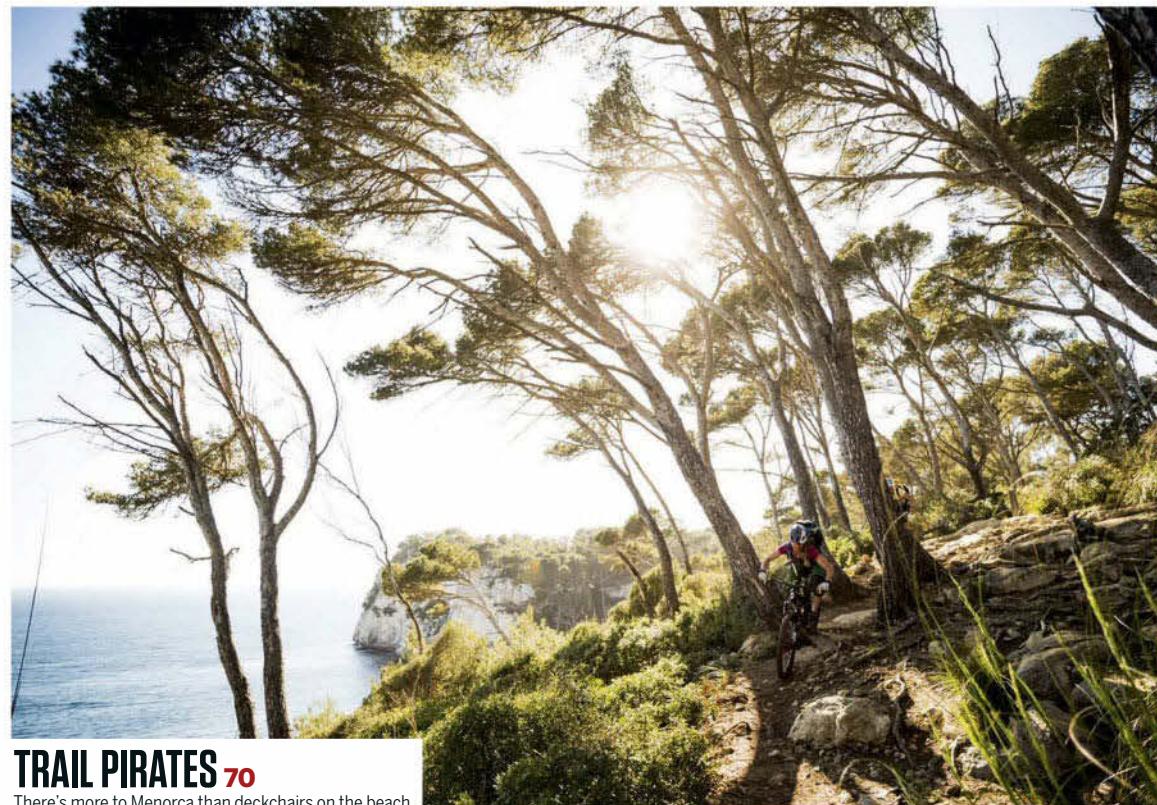
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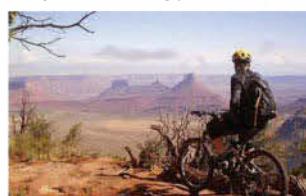
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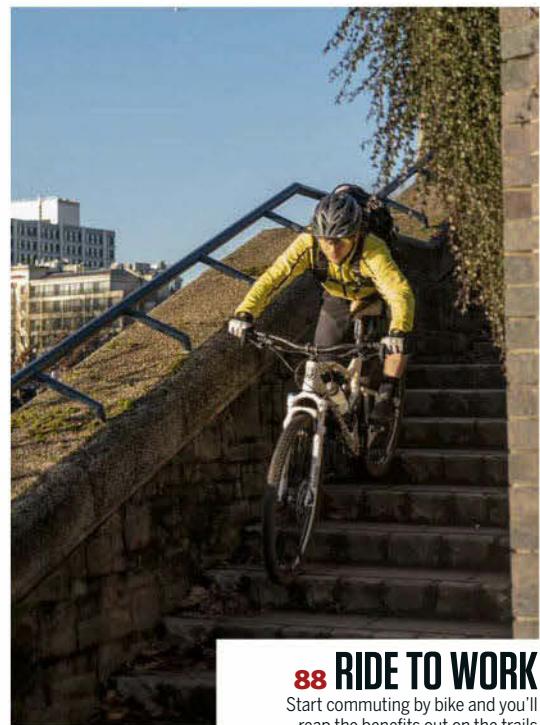
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# Out Front

THE **FIVE STORIES** LEADING  
THE WAY THIS MONTH





#### STORMIN' THE FORT

## Wet and wild

The hallowed slopes of Aonach Mor welcomed the world's fastest racers once at the start of June when the World Cup circus rolled into Fort William for the second stop of the 2015 downhill series. Unfortunately the sunshine and blue skies of the past two years were replaced with high winds and driving rain, testing the racers, organisers and Saturday spectators in equal measures.

Closure of the gondola forced a change of schedule, with practice, qualifying and finals all squeezed into a single day. Riders were finally greeted with some sunshine on Sunday afternoon, though that was too late to stop havoc being wreaked on the track. The carnage that ensued

will go down in history, with rider after rider going down – home favourites Danny Hart, Josh Bryceland and Manon Carpenter being three of the unlucky many who took a hit on this savage mountainside.

World Cup veterans Greg Minnaar and Rachel Atherton went on to win the day in front of the capacity crowd, with the South African's victory being especially notable – his 17th, it makes him the joint most successful World Cup racer of all time, alongside Santa Cruz Syndicate teammate Steve Peat. It was also a good day for British 4X world champ Katy Curd and Colombian racer Marcelo Gutierrez, who both stepped on to the DH World Cup podium for the first time – a huge milestone for any racer. ☀

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WILD TIMES IN WILTSHIRE

## Chalk up another rad trail for Tidworth

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### nestled in picturesque

Wiltshire countryside near the market town of Marlborough, what Tidworth Freeride lacks in elevation or gradient it makes up for with pure fun, packing half a dozen downhill trails of varying styles and difficulty into a small yet perfectly formed area.

But Phil Potts and the team behind these awesome trails haven't been resting on their laurels. Instead they've set about transforming one of the hill's original tracks (there have been trails here for 10 years) into a

modern day freeride line packed with drops, gaps, roots and fun times. The Oblivion line was completed just in time for spring and is a great addition to the bike park, packed with berms, jumps and roots.

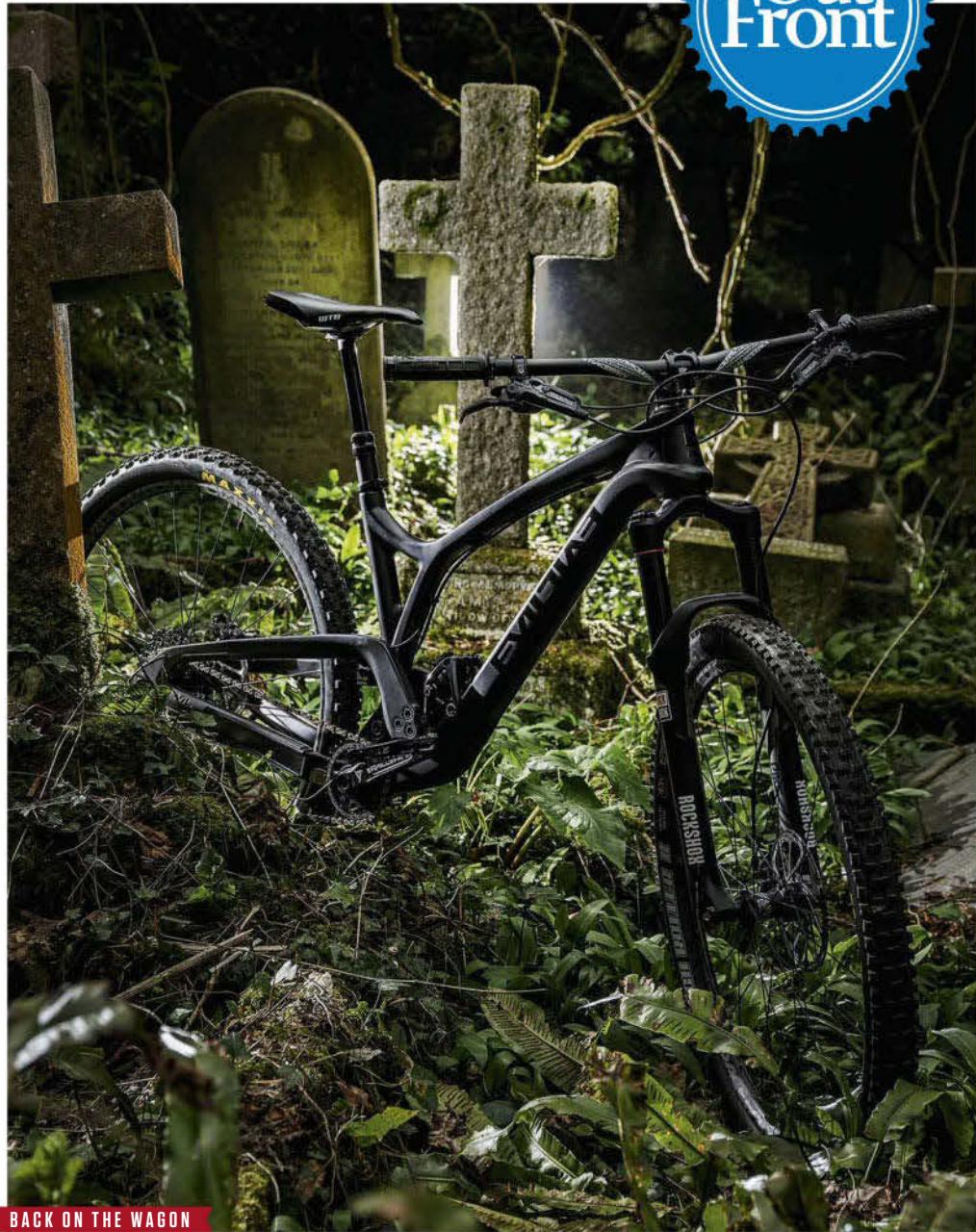
A pedal-up track is in the works for 'enduro' riders too, though the short length of the descents means getting back to the top for another go is just a short push anyway, maximising your time on the bike.

Tidworth's chalky hillside really does have something for anyone in search of gravity-fuelled fun, with

the likes of Humps And Bumps for the air merchants, the high-speed and technically challenging Sick Note for the DH racers and the fun and flowy General Berminator and White Line for first-timers to get stuck into, not to mention a separate dirt jump area.

It costs £5 to ride there all day, so pack your bike and some pads and get on down to see what all the fuss is about. Just be careful if it's wet because the chalky trails can get pretty greasy and wild!

[www.tidworthfreeride.co.uk](http://www.tidworthfreeride.co.uk)



BACK ON THE WAGON

## Second coming of the 29er

**W**hen 29ers exploded on to the scene a few years back they met with a mixed reception because of their gangly looks (to eyes used to the more compact silhouette of 26in bikes) and unique ride characteristics. Though undeniably fast on rough terrain, poor geometry and flexy wheels meant many early 29ers weren't much fun on tighter trails. This saw them pigeonholed as bikes aimed squarely at XC and light trail riding. But that hasn't

stopped some brands from pushing the design envelope.

When Specialized unveiled their 135mm (5.3in) travel Stumpjumper FSR EVO 29, and then their 155mm (6.1in) travel Enduro 29, both sporting geometry with a nod towards the gnarlier end of things, the stage was set. Now bikes like Evil's The Following and Niner's ROS 9 hardtail are opening riders' eyes to what's possible with a wheel size once associated with anything but getting rad.

The biggest challenge has always been finding a frame

layout that works with the larger wheels, both in terms of geometry and suspension. By shortening chainstay lengths, lowering BB heights and slackening head angles to numbers once considered progressive for 26in and 650b bikes, designers are breathing new life into a corner of the bike world that had been written off by some.

With more of these progressive 29ers set to hit the trails in 2016, the stereotype that's held 'wagon wheelers' back is on the verge of being eradicated once and for all. ☀

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GREG CALLAGHAN

## The luck of the Irish

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**W**hen a partisan crowd cheered local boy Greg Callaghan to his first Enduro World Series win in Ireland earlier this year it was easy to talk of a home advantage. But those mutterings were swiftly silenced when he finished third at the following round across the Irish Sea in Scotland's Tweed Valley, cementing his arrival on the world stage as a serious podium contender.

Hailing from Rathfarnham in the foothills of Dublin's Wicklow Mountains, Greg's life on two wheels started in motorcycle trials, where he

was representing Ireland by the time he was 15. After getting into DH racing aged 16 he became the junior national champion and went on to race at an Elite level for several years, racking up senior national titles and representing Ireland on the world stage.

The burgeoning enduro scene was hard to ignore though, especially in a country with little terrain worthy of a downhill bike, and by 2012 Greg was competing in both disciplines. That year, he represented Ireland at the DH World Championships, was crowned enduro national champ and helped his team win bronze at the Enduro des

Nations. That meant when the EWS rolled into Wicklow, all eyes were on the local boy and Cube Action Team member to deliver.

Wearing an emerald green helmet and riding a green bike, Greg didn't just put on a show for the huge crowds over that sunny May weekend, he won convincingly, taking three stages and not dropping outside the top four all day. The reception was rapturous, and he proved it was no fluke a week later in Scotland, where another stage win and third place on the podium put him in second place overall in the series standings. ☀



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## PLUS-SIZE MODELS

## Fatbike tech trickles down to the trail

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**F**atbikes have gone from exotic curiosities built to conquer snow and sand to something seen on our local trails. But while they deliver tons of grip and 'roll over anything' ability, they can't match the agility and speed of regular trail bikes. What if you could have the best of both worlds though? That's the thinking behind the new breed of 650b+ and 29+ bikes, which mix larger diameter wheels (650b or 29in

vs 26in) with narrower but still pretty wide tyres (3in vs 4-5in) to produce terrain-conquering machines that roll faster, weigh less and don't handle quite as quirky as full-on fatbikes.

WTB are one of the first brands to tap into this burgeoning market with the Scraper – a tubeless-ready aluminium rim that measures a whopping 45mm internally. Yep, that's twice as wide as a lot of trail rims. It's designed to be run with 2.8in tyres,

such as their new Trailblazer, a shallow-treaded monster designed to maximise grip without causing too much drag. If you want to strap all your gear to a bike and head out into the back of beyond for a few days, this new 'half-fat' kit could be just the ticket. ☀

WTB Scraper rim (650b or 29in)

£124.99

WTB Trailblazer 27.5x2.8in tyre £46

**Hotlines** [www.hotlines-uk.co.uk](http://www.hotlines-uk.co.uk)



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When we set out to build the best Enduro bike on the market, there were quite a few things we wanted to make sure of. It needed to be easy to pedal in the rough stuff and unstoppable on the downhills of the world's most challenging Enduros.

The Sanction was developed with GT Factory Racing's athletes; it shares their addiction to the effects of gravity. Dirt Magazine liked it so much it made them swear - it really is that bloody good.

#IdEnduroThat

GT Sanction Expert £2499.99

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# MAXLIGHT FF29

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**27PLUS** WTB 'Scraper' rim and 'Trailblazer' 2.8" tyre is equivalent to 29" diameter but with high volume for unparalleled trail grip and hardtail comfort.



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**24 MINT AT FORT BILL**  
Woolly World Cup antics



**29 THE DIRTY DEBATE**  
Manmade vs natural trails



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# The Pulse

MOUNTAIN BIKING THAT  
MAKES YOU FEEL ALIVE

## Cabin fever

**T**rials legend Hans Rey has been on the scene pretty much since it began and made his name taking his supreme bike handling skills to places where you wouldn't normally see a mountain bike. All these years on, his approach may have changed a little but Hans is always seeking new two-wheeled adventures around the world. Partly to explore the untapped riding this glorious planet of ours has to offer, but also to support and promote his charity Wheels 4 Life and visit the people who are benefitting from it. Hans is just back from a trip to Central America where he embarked on an epic hut-to-hut adventure across the Guatemalan Highlands. On his travels he visited the country's first bike park – El Zur – and rode close to several of the area's active volcanoes before traversing a series of valleys and mountain ranges to reach remote villages and cabins. Here are some of the highlights from his trip, but if you want to read about his whole adventure then head over to MBUK.com. It's inspirational stuff! ☀

### MOONSHINE & CHICKEN BROTH

Riding through the highlands at 10,000ft, Hans's party relied on simple backpackers' huts for shelter, where they whiled away the evenings drinking moonshine and playing dice. In one village, they were invited into the hut of a local family, who shared their supper of chicken broth with noodles, potatoes and eggs with them to help keep them warm in the sub-zero temperatures.



### CHARITY CASE

Wheels 4 Life ([www.wheels4life.org](http://www.wheels4life.org)) provides free bikes to isolated communities in the Third World to help them escape poverty. It's a charity that's close to Hans's heart – he's the executive director – so he was delighted to help hand out 31 bikes during his visit and meet some of the previous recipients, who are using them to get themselves an education.



### NEVER-ENDING DOWNHILL

Surrounded by active volcanoes, the cobblestoned colonial city of Antigua Guatemala is also home to the country's first bike park. Descending from half way up the Volcán de Agua, the 20km downhill took Hans and his companions through a cloud forest, with plenty of loose volcanic soil to keep them on their toes.



## HANNAH BARNES

RACER AND ADVENTURER

**“**The past couple of months have been a whirlwind! I had a perfect start to the season in New Zealand, where I got some sunshine, filmed a video, raced the EWS and attended the launch of Specialized's new Stumpjumper and Rhyme FSR. I'm new to the team but a week riding in all weathers, white-water rafting and sharing big dinners meant I got to know everyone pretty well!

Next, it was pretty surreal to visit Specialized's HQ in California – it's got a wind tunnel, gym, pump track, historic bikes on the walls and dogs at the desks! From there I travelled

to the Sea Otter Classic, via three days in hippy Santa Cruz with the enduro and XC teams in a big house by the beach.

For the past few weeks I've been on the road in my little camper van, travelling to the EWS races in Ireland and Scotland. The Irish round was my favourite yet – fun, fast, flowy and dusty trails on a compact hillside with a lot of excited people on! The sun was out and the Irish people have great craic. It was a pleasure to visit such a cool country with such warm people!

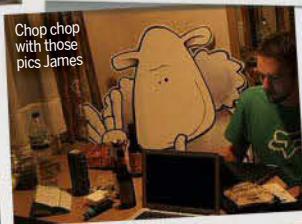
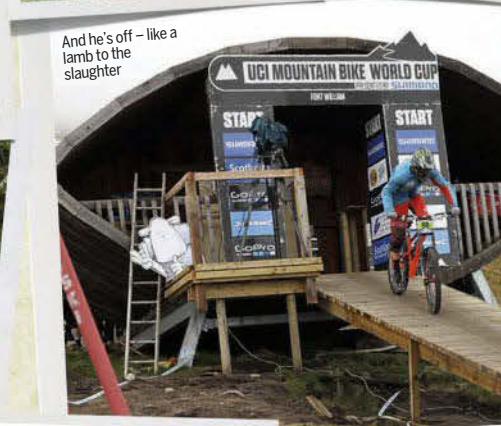
After just two days off, which were spent getting an overnight ferry, driving and doing laundry, it was straight into race practice again at TweedLove. Now I'm back in Fort William for 10 days, enjoying home life until the next adventure!

**“**

# MINT SAUCE DOES FORT BILL!

OUR FAVOURITE OVINE HOOSFS IT TO SCOTLAND TO CHECK OUT ALL THE ACTION AT WORLD CUP #2

Wish ewe were here?  
Mint stops off for some sightseeing



# A TO Z OF MOUNTAIN BIKING

## H Horst Link

**The Horst Link based four-bar linkage suspension design has appeared on a huge number of bikes since its US patent was granted in 1996. Here's what you need to know about it.**

Horst Leitner, the Austrian born, California based designer of the Horst Link, won multiple International Six Day Enduro motorcycle races and competed in the Motocross World Championships. He designed several MX bikes before setting up the MTB brand AMP Research.

The first Horst Link bikes were produced in the early Nineties under the AMP name. The patent was soon sold to Specialized, who've made it the basis for all of their FSR bikes. Spesh have licensed the design to several other brands too, such as Norco and Turner.

The defining feature of the Horst Link design is a pivot on the chainstays, just



in front of the rear axle. This splits the rear end of the bike into a parallelogram arrangement of four linked 'bars' and means the rear wheel can move up and down – not just in a simple arc, as on a single-pivot design – minimising the effects of pedalling and braking on the suspension.

Some rival companies have worked around the patent by making slight alterations, such as moving the rear pivots to the end of the seatstays (this is often referred to as a 'faux-bar' design). Others, such as Cube and Lapierre, have produced Horst Link bikes but have avoided

paying a licence fee to Specialized by not selling them in the States.

The Horst Link patent has now expired, so any company can use the design without having to pay royalties. That can only be a good thing for those of us who ride!

### 6 SECOND COACH

#### THINK TO RIDE FASTER

Thinking about how you're going to tackle trail features will help you ride faster. It may cause a bit of brain ache to start with if you're used to daydreaming, but it'll soon become second nature! Here are the top things to focus on...

##### 2 Wide or straight?

As a rule of thumb, it's nearly always faster to set up wide for corners. The opposite is true on rough terrain – try to take the most direct line possible.



**1 Exit speed**  
To exit technical sections and corners as fast as possible, enter at a pace you know you can maintain without having to jab at your brakes.

**3 Stay smooth**  
Unweight your bike over rough sections and upslopes that'll sap your speed.

**4 Pump it**  
On tight downhill singletrack it's often faster to pump than pedal. It helps you maintain a balanced body position too.

# THE BEST OF...

## DUNKELD

Nestled in the heart of Perthshire in central Scotland, Dunkeld is renowned for its challenging downhill track but the area has much more to offer. Riddled with trails to suit all abilities and tastes, it's also home to the increasingly popular Dunkeld Enduro race, which takes place on several of the local hillsides and takes in some of the area's finest trails. This previously hidden gem is now a must-visit location.



### THE LOCAL

When not out riding his local trails, **Taj Hendry** can usually be found crafting new lines deep in the forest and sharing the awesomeness with fellow riders. Former RAF technician Taj knows a thing or two about suspension, running Scotland's only dedicated tuning and service centre, Flotec Suspension ([www.flotec-suspension.co.uk](http://www.flotec-suspension.co.uk)).



### ACCOMMODATION

Located right in the centre of town, the Royal Dunkeld Hotel ([www.royaldunkeld.co.uk](http://www.royaldunkeld.co.uk)) is a great spot for those looking for a comfortable stay with all modern conveniences. Just down the river and only a five-minute pedal from Craigvinean Forest, Invermill Farm Caravan Park ([www.invermillfarm.com](http://www.invermillfarm.com)) is an excellent budget option for those who prefer to sleep under the stars.



### TRAILS

If you're looking for a good cross-country loop, the trails north of Dunkeld towards Loch Ordie and beyond offer miles of possibilities. Newtyle Hill, a short ride from the centre of town, is a good starting point for gravity riding, with plenty of options for thrillseekers looking to test their mettle in the hills.



### ENTERTAINMENT

The Taybank ([www.thetaybank.org](http://www.thetaybank.org)) is a renowned pub that offers superb local ales, a roaring fire and regular live music. Quadbiking, clay pigeon shooting and the Land Rover Experience are also on offer in the area, should a day off the bike appeal.



### FOOD

For a good Scottish pub meal, The Atholl Arms Hotel in nearby Blair Atholl ([www.athollarmshotel.co.uk](http://www.athollarmshotel.co.uk)) is hard to beat. For a spice hit post ride, Darjeeling has a host of great dishes and stays open long after the others close their doors. For a coffee-and-cake pit stop, Palmerston's ([www.palmerstons.eu](http://www.palmerstons.eu)) offers a range of mouth-watering treats that are freshly baked each day.

## HOW TO... USE YOUR FREE CHAIN WEAR TOOL

As your chain wears it can affect your shifting – or even lead to the chain snapping. To check if yours needs replacing, place the twin prongs on the 0.75mm side of the tool over one chain rivet. If the single prong at the opposite end of the tool fits into a link further up the chain, it'll need replacing soon. If the 1mm side of the tool fits into the chain, it needs to be replaced immediately.





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# THE DIRTY DEBATE

We grapple with the big questions facing mountain biking

## NATURAL TRAILS or MANMADE TRAILS?



### NATURAL TRAILS

Olly Forster  
MBUK Staff Writer

There's no denying the huge importance of 'manufactured' riding destinations – trail centres, bike parks and uplift venues

– to the sport, but for me, natural trails are where it's at. Tracks that have evolved over the years, or at least been cut in by hand rather than machine,

### GIVE ME WET ROOTS, RUTS AND SERENITY IN THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE ANY DAY

provide a purer riding experience, and one that's more in tune with nature and the surrounding landscape. I'm no tree-hugging hippy, but witnessing the changing of the seasons and the effects this has on the trails is something I find really inspiring – as are the efforts local riders go to build and maintain their creations. And natural trails deliver a riding experience that'll teach you more than any machine-manufactured berm or tabletop ever will. Give me wet roots, ruts and serenity in the middle of nowhere any day.



### MANMADE TRAILS

Alex Evans  
MBUK Features Editor

I've just returned to the UK after living in the French Alps for seven years.

There, resorts such as Morzine and Les Gets are renowned for their off-piste singletrack – trails that are really gnarly, not very sustainable and actually pretty dangerous. Since moving back to the UK I've been surprised by the thriving trail centre scene. The trails here are suitable for all abilities and built exceptionally well, with water, gradient, maintenance and longevity in mind. The likes of the Forest of Dean, BikePark Wales and Innerleithen have an incredible wealth of trails that range

### THE TRAILS HERE ARE SUITABLE FOR ALL ABILITIES AND BUILT EXCEPTIONALLY WELL

from tight and technical to flowy and fast and they're always really well maintained. Natural trails are good but a high-grade manmade trail is hard to beat because, well, a man made it! Long live trail centres!

## KNOW YOUR BIKE

UNLOCKING THE TECHNICAL JARGON TO EXPLAIN HOW OUR BIKES WORK

## REAR AXLES

### Old school

We say 'old school' simply because there's been an explosion of new axle types recently, so don't fret if your pride and joy still uses the 135x10mm standard. Here the axle is part of the hub (it can't just be slid out), rests in open dropouts and is secured with a skinny 5mm quick-release skewer.



### New school

Most trail bikes now come with 142x12mm rear axles. Here the axle is separate from the hub. It's slid through closed dropouts and tightened into threads on the drive side, usually with a QR lever. This system is designed to be easier to use, more secure and stiffer than 135x10mm. The new 148x12mm 'Boost' standard is even wider, to allow the building of stiffer wheels.



### Gravity-specific

Downhill and freeride bikes use extra-wide rear ends for improved frame and wheel stiffness. Axles are mainly 150x12mm (Giant Glory, Scott Gambler) or the newer 157x12mm (Santa Cruz V10, Trek Session), though the original 135x12mm design is making a comeback (Specialized Demo 8). Axles are tightened with Allen keys rather than QR levers.





## THANK GOD FOR... HYDRATION PACKS

HYDRATION PACKS REALLY are a godsend. You can carry all the tools, spares and clothing needed for a day in the hills safely and securely on your back, with up to 3l of water in the bladder to keep you hydrated and good to go. What about water bottles? Well, they're great too, but half a litre of fluid – or a litre if you've got enough room in your frame for two bottles – really isn't enough on a long ride. The fact that hydration packs let you sip your drink without even having to take a hand off the bar is the icing on the cake. Some newer designs even have integrated back protectors and systems designed to lift the pack away from your skin and reduce that sweaty patch on your back that inevitably comes with wearing a bag. ☀

## FLASHBACK

### LATE '90S CUT-OFFS

MOUNTAIN BIKERS' TRANSITION from Lycra-clad ice skater lookalikes to action sports heroes didn't happen overnight. After Shaun Palmer introduced the DH scene to moto kit in '97, riders realised Lycra wasn't practical for the rough and tumble of mountain biking and really didn't look good either. In the absence of any MTB-specific baggy shorts, they had to resort to cutting up jeans and combat trousers.



# THAT WAS THEN THIS IS NOW!

### #56 Baggy shorts

### 2015 HIGH-TECH

ONLY HARDCORE XC riders sport Lycra shorts these days, with everyone else hitting the trails in baggies specifically designed for the rigours of mountain biking. The latest shorts are made from light, stretchy fabrics but can still take a real beating, and some can shrug off the elements too thanks to use of breathable, water-resistant materials. They're a far cry from what we had 15 years ago.



### #2 Cakes Coed Llandegla

We've tried cakes at almost every riding destination in the UK and the One Planet Adventure cafe's are at the top of the pile. The extensive menu would put most high-end cake outlets to shame, while the specially blended OPA coffee is the perfect complement to a slice. The millionaire's shortbread wins our vote, but you can't go wrong with any of these tasty treats!



# VISION STATEMENT



## MARIN 30<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY DEMO TOUR

To celebrate our 30<sup>TH</sup> Anniversary we're running a UK Demo Tour. Come and check out just why Marin have been at the forefront of mountain bike design for three decades.

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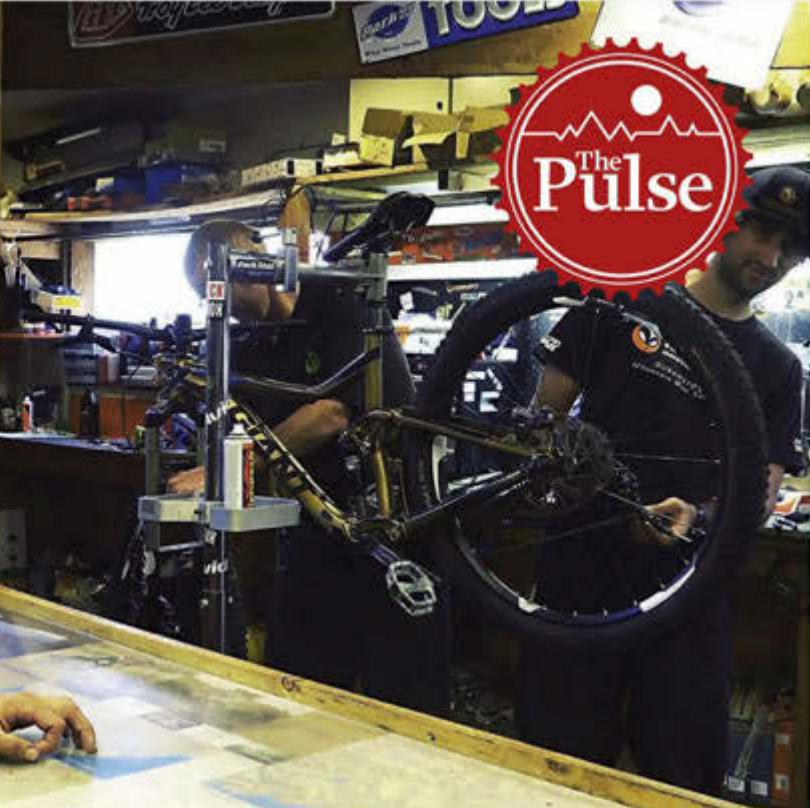
**EVOL** air cans will be available separately and will retrofit onto older shocks offering the full **EVOL** benefit!



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## — LIVING THE DREAM —

**INSPIRATIONAL STORIES FROM THOSE WHO'VE SUCCESSFULLY TURNED MOUNTAIN BIKING INTO MORE THAN JUST A HOBBY**

### **Paul Angus**

**Vertigo Bikes,  
Queenstown, NZ**

Paul 'Pang' Angus was a regular on the UK downhill race scene and also raced World Cups for a few years before moving to the land of dreams that is New Zealand. After finding work in a bike shop he ended up becoming a director of the company and, working hard with his business partner Tim Ceci, has put Vertigo on the map as the shop to go to in Queenstown.

**My life revolved around DH racing back in the late 90s and early 2000s.** I worked casually at my family's garden centre driving forklifts and big trucks, and I managed to sneak in a degree, but all I wanted to do was ride and race.

**Tim Ceci started Vertigo in 1999 as a little shop offering guided mountain bike trips.** He hand-built one of the first tracks on Skyline Hill (now Queenstown Bike Park) so he could offer tourists the chance to give downhill a go using the gondola to get to the top. Things just evolved from there. I scored a job at Vertigo when I first moved to Queenstown in 2006. I got in the door through a friend telling Tim about me, and he just so happened to need someone. It was pretty

quiet back then, nothing like it is now – you could run the shop with one person!

**Officially I'm a director of the company now along with Tim.** Vertigo is just a small company so we both work on the shop floor with the other staff, getting our hands dirty. It's a varied job. We spend our weeks fixing bikes, guiding heli-bike trips, coaching in the bike park, driving shuttles and telling tourists where [legendary Queenstown burger joint] Fergburger is.

**Knowing people in the industry has helped a lot – they always say it's who you know, not what you know.** But more than anything it's just been hard work and man-hours doing something I'm genuinely passionate about. I look forward to going to work every day!

**We've stayed true to our roots and never tried to spread ourselves thin.** We're a core MTB business. We have character and we're a bit rough around the edges, like all good bike shops I think. The biggest difference is our staff. We always get awesome staff, and for me the best part of owning a business is making sure my staff are happy and enjoying their job. That reflects in the service they give and the vibe of the shop.

**Putting on and sponsoring local events is key – putting back in.** We run our own race series, sponsor a bunch of races and organised the first whip-off contest in NZ

this year, which went huge! We decided to do this so we could set ourselves apart from the other shops in town and to help promote the Queenstown MTB Club. Rather than offer discounts we thought we'd put on a free race series. We kept the fun element high by having a team format, and we introduced proper timing too, but with a handicap system to even the playing field. I thoroughly enjoyed doing it and hopefully it'll only grow from here. All you need to know is #huckingisthenewenduro.

**New Zealand is the land of opportunity, and Queenstown is the hub of that.** I think we got into it at the right time too. Up until the last three to four years mountain biking wasn't that big in Queenstown, but

**It's a varied job. We spend our weeks fixing bikes, guiding heli-bike trips, coaching in the bike park and driving shuttles**

now it's becoming a true destination and everything's falling into place for us. NZ is an amazing country to live and work in. Queenstown can be a hard place to live in initially – like all resort towns it's expensive. I can say that it only gets easier the longer you're here though, and it only gets better too!

MBUK

# RETAIL THERAPY

## CAR PARK COOL

After some new summer threads to slip into after a day riding dusty trails? Here's a selection of T-shirts, shorts, caps and shades to keep you looking and feeling fresh



Dan Atherton | Germany, Continental production plant, Korbach, bicycle building section.  
Continental employee, Ulf Günzel | [www.conti-bicycleyes.com](http://www.conti-bicycleyes.com)

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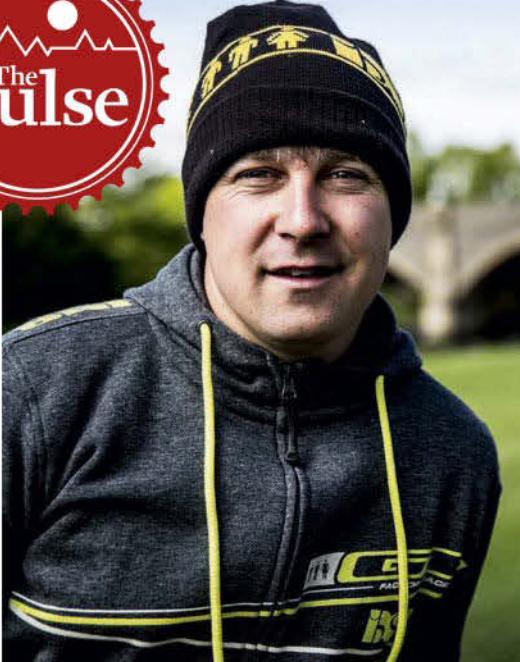
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## INDUSTRY INSIDER

# DAN BROWN

TEAM DIRECTOR, GT FACTORY RACING

### Top job

Working with the best products at the highest level of competition with world-class athletes (Dan, Gee and Rachel Atherton, plus Taylor Vernon and Martin Maes) takes a lot to beat! I've always wanted to work in sport and to be able to do it in mountain biking is exactly what I dreamt of when I was young.

### Pre-season prep

What's a typical day in the office like? Hectic! We can have up to 10 people here. We have the team coach here twice a week doing training sessions, and two mechanics getting bikes and orders sorted before the big kick-off. With two teams working to different schedules [DH and enduro] the work is ever increasing, but it feels like we have it on lockdown this year.

### Race weekends

It's always an early start at races. Rach has a tough schedule and isn't great in the mornings so normally the first job is to make sure she's awake! We drive or ride to the pits, then it's straight into a 30-minute warm-up that would probably do for the average person's weekly exercise. When practice starts I try to get on track and review lines and conditions, sometimes walking it three times in a day. We've found that the fewer people kicking around the pits the better, so I ensure there

are no distractions. Once they're all on the lift it's just a matter of watching the action and relaying info to the mechanics. I'm nervous as hell during the runs, but once the clock starts there's nothing I can do so I get engrossed in the action, shouting like an idiot. Post race it's a matter of helping to drink the champagne!

### Challenges

Injuries are the biggest challenge. I try to keep the other riders separated from the injured party – negative thoughts aren't good in the build-up to a race. Gee has a bit of a nemesis in Mont-Sainte-Anne. Something always goes wrong there. Last year he had another big crash but we had a physio out with us to sort that very situation.

### The next level

If I could take control of the sport I'd invest in a marketing agency to find the sponsors it needs to take the next steps – more mainstream TV coverage, bigger prize funds, fewer competitors at World Cups. We're not too far off an amazing product, it just needs that little kick that's impossible without extra funding.

### 2015 season

I'm super-excited about every EWS and World Cup. Highlights will be World Champs for the nuts track, Red Bull Hardline for progression and Finale Ligure for the EWS wrap-up.

# WIN! AMPLIFI RIDING GEAR



Amplifi's UK distributors Paligap are giving away three great prize bundles to help keep you protected out on the trails.

**First prize**, worth up to £300, is a Stratos MK II backpack, a set of MK II knee and elbow pads, and a pair of Hand Shoe Wheel gloves.

**Second prize** is an Orion backpack, a MK II armour vest and a pair of Hand Shoe Wheel gloves, worth up to £226.

**Third prize** is an Apollo 7 backpack and a pair of Hand Shoe Wheel gloves, worth up to £95.

For a chance to win one of these great prizes, simply submit your answer to the following question at <http://competition.immediate.co.uk/amplifi> –

#### What country do Amplifi originate from?

- A. United Kingdom
- B. Australia
- C. Germany

TERMS & CONDITIONS: The promoter is Immediate Media Company Bristol Limited, Tower House, Fairfax Street, Bristol, BS1 3BN. The closing date for entries is 11:55pm on 10.08.15. Full terms and conditions can be viewed at <http://competition.immediate.co.uk/amplifi>. The promotion is open to all residents of the UK, including the Channel Islands, aged 18 years or older.





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#### BIG BLOCK

XT's new 11-speed cassette offers a wider range than XTR but will still fit on any freehub, unlike the SRAM equivalents



#### SLICK SHIFTS

Shimano aren't ready to consign the front mech to the dustbin of history, and the XT derailleur makes a good case for its survival



#### TOP VALUE

Rear derailleurs are vulnerable to crash damage. Thankfully the XT mech is the cheapest 1x11 option yet, at £74.99



#### ALL THE OPTIONS

There's a choice of one, two or three chainrings up front. The single ring has a 'Dynamic Chain Engagement' tooth profile

New for  
2015

# THE XT FACTOR

*Five reasons to check out Shimano's latest groupset*

1

**ONE MORE COG**  
Following its blingy XTR brother, Shimano Deore XT now boasts 11 sprockets out back. The latest generation M8000 group is available in 1x, 2x and 3x configurations, and unlike SRAM's 11-speed offerings, Shimano's wide-range cassettes don't require a special freehub so they'll fit on the wheels you're already running.

2

**WIDE-RANGE 1X OPTION**  
Late to the table they may be, but Shimano now offer XT in a single-ring specific version with its own 11-42t cassette, which offers a wider range than the new XTR's 11-40t block. Not everyone wants to do away with a front derailleur though, so on to our next point...

3

**FRONT MECH IS THE BEST IN THE BUSINESS**  
Shimano have incorporated their side-swing technology into the new XT front derailleur. First seen on XTR, the design makes for an incredibly smooth and light shift action and maximises clearance too.

4

**IT'S SURPRISINGLY AFFORDABLE**  
XT has always been well priced but this latest generation groupset ups the value stakes even further. A crankset minus the chainring(s) costs a very reasonable £100, and the most expensive cassette is just £80. Crucially, XT undercuts SRAM's latest and most affordable 1x groupset, GX.

5

**NOTHING CAN MATCH ITS HERITAGE**  
Way back in 1983 Shimano rolled out the world's first mountain bike specific groupset and guess what it was called... yup, Deore XT. It's remained one of the most important names in mountain biking ever since and on the basis of this latest version, will do so for many years to come.

# THE EMPIRE VR90



## OFF-ROAD PERFORMANCE, REDEFINED

The Empire™ VR90 is a new direction in high-performance off-road shoes, featuring a lightweight laced one-piece upper for unrivaled comfort, and an Easton® EC90 full carbon outsole with Vibram® Mont molded rubber tread for relentless grip. The upper is made of a breathable Evofiber™ synthetic upper Teijin® for superb fit and support that won't stretch out with wear or weather. Our adjustable SuperNatural Fit footbed lets you fine-tune the fit and arch support, for maximum pedaling efficiency. Available now in two colors – Black/Glowing Red or Silver/Highlight Yellow. [Giro.com](http://Giro.com)



# WIN! MONDRAKER FOXY XR & WITTER BIKE RACK

WORTH UP  
TO £3,800!

The Mondraker Foxy XR is a benchmark trail bike that's setting trends with its radical but carefully thought out new-school geometry. The combination of a longer than usual front end with a super-short stem results in a bike that's ultra-stable at speed but offers lightning-fast handling to help you shred steep sections and conquer rough, gnarly tracks. Coupled with Mondraker's suspension system, which is claimed to eliminate pedal feedback, power loss and brake jack, the result is a bike that can go everywhere and do it all at speed, with ease.

Retailing at £3,199, the Foxy XR won our sister magazine *What Mountain Bike*'s 2014 Trail Bike Of The Year award and was a finalist in 2015's competition, and now Mondraker's UK



MONDRAKER®



distributors, **Silverfish UK**, have one to give away to a lucky MBUK reader.

And that's not all – to go with the bike, **Witter Towbars** will be providing a bike rack of the winner's choosing from their versatile ZX500 range. Worth up to £600 and capable of carrying up to four bikes, this sturdy and easy-to-use towbar-mounted rack is the perfect way to get your new ride safely to the trails.

For a chance to win this great prize, all you have to do is answer the two questions printed in MBUK and submit each answer on the competition page on Silverfish UK's website. It really is that easy! The first question was printed last issue (317) and the second is below – you need to answer both parts for your entry to count. So get your thinking caps on for a chance to win a top-spec trail bike and a feature-packed car rack!



## Question 2

**What do Mondraker call their no-compromise suspension system?**

- A. Aero Suspension System
- B. Hero Suspension System
- C. Zero Suspension System

**Enter here**

[www.silverfish-uk.com/NewsDetail/151990/MBUK-Mondraker-Competition](http://www.silverfish-uk.com/NewsDetail/151990/MBUK-Mondraker-Competition)  
Or visit the Silverfish home page: [www.silverfish-uk.com](http://www.silverfish-uk.com)



**TERMS & CONDITIONS:** Promoter: Silverfish UK Limited, Units 3B & 3C Woodacre Court, Saltash Parkway Industrial Estate, Burrator Road, Saltash, Cornwall PL12 8LY. The winner will be drawn at random from a list of entrants who correctly answer both questions printed in MBUK magazine. One question will be presented in issue 317 and a second presented in issue 318. If it will be obvious if the question presented is question 1 or question 2. Answers must be submitted on the competition page on Silverfish UK Limited's website ([www.silverfish-uk.com/NewsDetail/151990/MBUK-Mondraker-Competition](http://www.silverfish-uk.com/NewsDetail/151990/MBUK-Mondraker-Competition)). Entrants must answer all relevant questions and enter all details correctly on the form. Entries will be accepted until the close of the competition at 23:59 BST on 31 July 2016. The winner will be drawn at random from all entries received by 23:59 BST on 31 July 2016 and announced after he or she responds and accepts the prize. A response must be received within 10 days of the competition closing or a new winner will be chosen. Entrants must be 16 years or older and not employees of Immediate Media Company Limited, Silverfish UK Limited, Witter Towbars Limited or Elyra Marketing Services, or family thereof. The competition is open only to residents of the UK. The prize consists of a 2016 Mondraker Foxy XR bicycle worth £3,199.99 (RRP), a £100 gift card plus a black towbar-mounted cycle carrier from the ZX500 range (winner chooses model) worth from £415.20 to £600. It is possible the Mondraker bicycle offered will be out of stock in the chosen size. In this event the bicycle supplier – Silverfish UK Limited – may offer any other Mondraker bicycle of a similar value. If there are no other bicycles suitable for the prize winner, there may be a delay of delivery until the 2016 Mondraker Foxy XR becomes available. Delivery time for these bicycles is not known at time of going to print. There is no cash alternative. The winner will be announced on the competition entry page and Silverfish UK Limited's Facebook and Twitter pages. Full terms and conditions are available on the competition entry page.



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▼ BRENDAN FAIRCLOUGH



# NO SHORTCUTS

It's not just what you see the moment you need to be at your best, it's that you were passionate enough to spend years of moments chewing up dirt to get there.



# SEND IT!



YOUR MAIL,  
PHOTOS, IDEAS  
AND RANTS

**CONTACT US:** Write to: MBUK Send it! Tower House, Fairfax Street, Bristol, BS1 3BN  
Email: [mbuk@bikeradar.com](mailto:mbuk@bikeradar.com) Visit: [www.bikeradar.com/forums](http://www.bikeradar.com/forums)

## MBUK STAR LETTER

**STAR LETTER**

It's half term. My friends and I are bored of riding crappy local trails and building dirt jumps we can't jump. Our parents are at work, none of us is old enough to drive and the nearest trail centre is a half-hour drive away. "Why not get the train?" suggests a friend. Next thing I know we're waiting on the platform in baking sunshine, eager to hit Cardinham Woods like a bag of wet sh\*t.

After nearly missing a train due to trouble getting our bikes on (please do something, First Great Western!) we soon arrive at our stop and race out of the station and into paradise. We make our way along the singletrack, up painful climbs and down fast



sections of gravel and loose slate. The sun beats down, Satan himself is grasping at our throats, my calves scream and my head pounds to the beat of my creaky bottom bracket. Knees are cut, elbows bleeding and my water has run out.

Finally, the end of the trail appears. A few races down the Lanhydrock 4X track on our slightly oversized 29ers later we head back to the station, wallriding banks and doing as many drops as we can along the

way. As the train leaves, we say goodbye to one of the best days we've had together.

**SAM PENTECOST, PLYMOUTH**

*Trains are an ace way to get to the trails. We've tried it ourselves a couple of times, on trips to Swinley Forest and Fort William. The only problem comes when there's a rail strike. Or maintenance work. Or leaves on the line. For the five days of the year when they're running on time they're great though.*



If your letter gets picked as the Star Letter, you'll receive a pair of DMR Vault pedals worth £99.99, courtesy of Upgrade ([www.upgradebikes.co.uk](http://www.upgradebikes.co.uk)). For full Mountain Biking UK terms and conditions, see p12.

## Return to the wild

I've been riding BMX since my ninth birthday, in 1985, when I got my first Raleigh Burner, and I've rarely had a break. Until now. The last time I rode a mountain bike was in 1996/97 when I worked for Cycle World in Sunderland. Fast-forward 18 years and I felt the calling to get out of the concrete and back into the wild again. So I bought a friend's Lapierre Zesty, clipped back in and got fully bitten. I can't begin to describe how much freedom this has given me. I think only people who ride in the wilds can understand the amount of headspace it gives you. So maybe

now it's time to put the 20in to bed for a while and put to practice what 30 years of BMX has taught me – that the faster you go, the more fun it gets.

**ADAM ADEY, VIA EMAIL**

Glad to have you on board, Adam. Just watch out if you get back on your BMX – it's amazing how quickly your knees and wrists get used to suspension!

## Commuting rocks!

Riding is a big passion in my life – on road or off, rain or shine, I love every minute. Life has a habit of throwing a spanner in the works

## SOCIAL STUFF

**@ MBUK FORUM**

[www.bikeradar.com/forums](http://www.bikeradar.com/forums)

**Do I need a peak on my helmet?**

They're useful for keeping rain and hail off your face, and the sun out of your eyes – **Kajjal**

A peak tells everyone you're a mountain biker. I wear my enduro lid on my road bike so people

though, be it working long hours or family commitments. I had so little time left for riding that I began to wonder what the point was of having a bike. Then the answer became clear – commuting! Leaving for work 30 minutes earlier than normal and taking a fantastic bridleway, I now get the quality 'me time' and feeling of freedom that we all cherish – if only for an hour – as well as a way to justify new upgrades. Such a simple solution but very effective. Where there's a wheel there's a way!

**JAMIE 'THE POSTIE' PHILLIPS,**

FOULRIDGE, LANCASHIRE

Yep, commuting by bike sure beats sitting in traffic or standing around

**SOCIAL STUFF****@ MBUK FORUM**

[www.bikeradar.com/forums](http://www.bikeradar.com/forums)

know I haven't gone full retard – **paul.skibum**

I take them off. I know of people injured when their peak was mashed into their face – **njee20**

They're useful on long, draggy fireroad climbs to block that horrible view of the trail going up and up  
– **The Waylander**

**FACEBOOK**

[www.facebook.com/MBUKMag](http://www.facebook.com/MBUKMag)

**Any wildlife encounters?**

Had an owl fly beside me on a night ride. Made me feel like a badass  
– **Warren Laidler**

I give the rare breed cattle in my area a wide berth – don't fancy being on the pointy end of those horns  
– **Scott Rolfe**

We get some pretty lively squirrels at Woburn!  
– **Bennet Hillman**

I was nearly taken out by a herd of deer at Kingley Vale while travelling at 35mph+. Crapped myself  
– **Tony Connolly**

**TWITTER**

<http://twitter.com/mbukmagazine>

**Best race discipline?**

Everything! Enduro everyone can relate to, DH is pure adrenaline and the level of fitness in XC is unreal – **@picklemtb**

It's got to be 4X  
– **@nakedracing**

Enduro and DH. I find XC a bit dull and lycra-clad  
– **@Positive4Blood**

D for 'don't'. H for 'have to ask...' – **@AndrewDriver**

waiting for public transport. Head over to our latest '10 to do in 2015' feature on page 88 for some more commuting tips.

**Start 'em young**

This is my two-year-old little man, Beau. He's already obsessed with bikes and is currently riding a green Strider 12. He's gone tubeless, with solid foam tires on 12in plastic mag rims. He's opted for no stem, no brakes and rocks a pair of Daddy's old ESL grips. He's shredding the trails (garden path) no feet, balance bike styley. He'd love to catch a glimpse of himself in your excellent mag before he tears it to pieces in excitement.

**SAM GREGORY, VIA EMAIL**  
That's not the kind of shredding we normally aim to inspire, but each to his own...

Beau – a mini Danny Mac in the making!

**In the pink**

All the reviews of the Bell Super 2R are missing out one vital piece of information. The helmet sold as 'infrared' is pink. A very odd pink, but pink nevertheless. By the way, it's PINK.

**BAZ WELSH, VIA EMAIL**  
It's hard to tell whether you're disappointed or excited, Baz. You're not wrong though.



Bell's Super 2R – it's pink, apparently

**The small print**

Email your letters and photos to [mbuk@bikeradar.com](mailto:mbuk@bikeradar.com).

- The 'Star Photo' winner will receive a Lezyne CNC Dirt Floor Drive pump worth £89.99.
- The 'That's Gotta Hurt' winner will receive a Lezyne Port A Shop toolkit worth £99.99.
- The 'Hardcore Heroes' winner will receive an Effetto Mariposa Caffelaté Tubeless Conversion Kit worth £49.99.

Turn to p12 for full Mountain Biking UK terms and conditions.



**THEO BOX** shreds his local Bath trails on his Nukeproof Mega. Pic by his dad, Richard



**ADAM GORDON** attempts to be the first mountain biker in space. Pic taken by **ARRON JONES** at Tavi Woodlands in Devon

**WIN Effetto tubeless kit**



Now that's a view! **ALEX FILDES, MIKE NEWHAM** and **KEVIN MOUNTCASTLE** make the most of a rare dry day in the Lake District. Pic by **GARETH ALLRED**



**MBUK THAT'S GOTTA HURT**

**NICKY JONES** was impaled on the rails of her saddle after wiping out in Morzine, France, leaving her in agony. A €120 taxi ride to hospital resulted in 12 stitches, but persistent pain meant she had to have reconstructive surgery 10 months later. Nicky's had weeks off the bike – and even worse, still hasn't been able to consummate her marriage after getting wed back in September!

**WIN Lezyne tool package**

## MBUK STAR PHOTO



**JACK CALLOCOTT** makes the most of a rare chance to fit a mirror lens and kick up some dust in Wales, during the Conquer the Cliff downhill race in Aberystwyth where he finished 23rd. Pic by **ANTHONY PEASE**

**JAMIE HEWITT** from Staffordshire looks remarkably calm considering he's about to piledrive into the dirt!



Here's 12 year old **RONAN WHITE** trying out his new bike at the Quiraing on the Isle of Skye. We wish our local tracks looked like this!



**GLENN ATKINSON** from Telford soaks up the view from Moab's classic Porcupine Rim Trail on a 50th birthday present trip to Utah. Pic by **AL BRAYBROOK**

## TWEETS OF THE MONTH



WOW!!! What a couple of weeks! Couldn't be happier to be on the podium two weeks in a row...

#pintspinspins

- Sounds like this month's Out Front star **Greg Callaghan** will be having an ale or two to celebrate his Enduro World Series success!



Throwin' some drain plugs in the #joesdirt section at the Snow Summit Bike Park - **Kyle Strait** is no slouch on the trail or in the air, enjoying some California hang time at the iconic US venue of Snow Summit



Race machine is dialled and ready to go - **Aaron Gwin's** latest steed is one seriously sweet looking ride. Wonder if he'll follow up all the #gwinning he's been doing recently with some more stellar results?



Happy to get second to Manon Carpenter - that girl's on fire right now - **Katy Curd's** transition from 4X world champ to DH pinner is in full swing and she's getting increasingly closer to the dominant Carpenter and Atherton, with second at the latest British Downhill Series race and fifth at the Fort William World Cup



## INSTAGRAM

<http://instagram.com/mbukmagazine>



@**jonny\_collins87** and his pals have been hitting it hard in Northern Ireland



@**sebbieboi** can't wait to hit Enter The Dragon at BikePark Wales again



## T-130 TRAIL SUSPENSION 650b

New for 2015, the T-130 is the latest in a long and illustrious line of Whytes that let you go anywhere, ride anything and have maximum fun along the way. Boasting 130mm of QUAD-4 suspension travel, mid-sized 650b wheels and Whyte's groundbreaking trail bike geometry, the T-130 is fast and fun on the trails you ride from your front door, whilst never feeling out of its depth when you travel further afield, be it to the trail centres of Wales and Scotland or even the Alps.

However you like to ride, in the T-130 you'll discover a bike that's as versatile as a Swiss army knife, and that quickly becomes a trusted companion for a lifetime of adventure, wherever the trail takes you.



T-130 WORKS £2999 13kg



T-130 S £2299 13.5kg



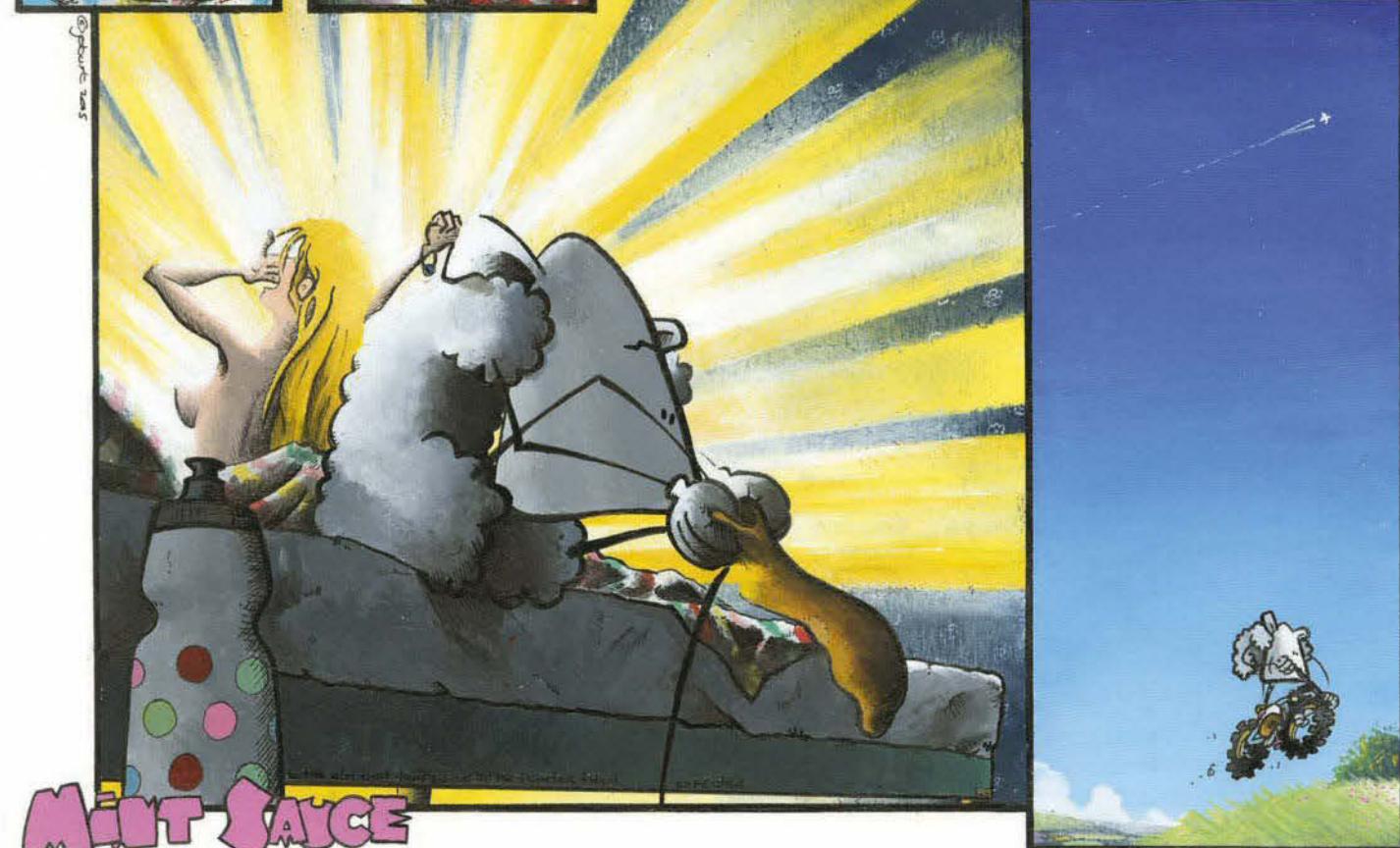
T-130 SX £1999 13.7kg



[whyte.bike](http://whyte.bike)

**WHYTE**  
PERFORMANCE BY DESIGN

BLOOD RED LIPS LIKE SOFT INTENTIONS, KISS MY EYES THEY'RE BLACK AND BLUE, EVEN IF I SHOULDN'T BE HERE, I CANNOT HELP MYSELF WITH YO



MINT JAYCE



# THE TRAIL LEGEND REBORN

---

Handling, efficiency, utility: These aren't just words to us—they've been the hallmarks of the Stumpjumper FSR since we started this whole trail thing. And with fully integrated SWAT technology, a new geometry, and a proprietary shock tune, the Stumpy's ready to push the envelope all over again.

[Specialized.com](http://Specialized.com)



1



**GET IT UP TO ATTACKING SPEED AND  
IT FEELS MORE LIKE A LIGHTWEIGHT  
DOWNHILL RIG THAN A TRAIL BIKE**

# FirstRides

MBUK

FEATURING: YT Capra AL 1 // Merida One-Forty 7.900 // Specialized S-Works Stumpjumper 29



The AL 1 packs a similar punch to the carbon Capra, at an even lower price



The Monarch Plus shock gives excellent support and control

## YT INDUSTRIES CAPRA AL 1

**FRAME** Hydroformed aluminium w/ carbon fibre seatstays, 165mm (6.5in) travel **FORK** RockShox Pike RCT3 Solo Air, 160mm (6.3in) travel **SHOCK** Rockshox Monarch Plus RCT3 **DRIVETRAIN** SRAM X1 w/ Race Face Turbine cranks and e\*thirteen XCX+ chain device (1x11)

**WHEELSET** DT Swiss E 1900 SPLINE wheels, Maxxis High Roller II MaxxPro EXO 27.5x2.4in tyres **BRAKES** SRAM Guide R **BAR/STEM** Race Face Atlas 35, 770mm/Race Face Atlas 35, 50mm **SEATPOST/SADDLE** RockShox Reverb Stealth/SDG Duster **WEIGHT** 14.4kg (31.7lb), size M with pedals **PRICE** €2,778.80 (approx £2,052) including box and shipping **CONTACT** YT Industries [www.yt-industries.com](http://www.yt-industries.com)

**Y**T's Capra CF was one of the most talked-about bikes of 2014 – a superb value and highly razzable package that proved a hit with trail centre warriors and privateer enduro racers alike. Carbon fibre isn't for everyone though and bumps the price up. The Capra AL brings an almost identical frame in alloy, and at an even more gobsmacking price. We couldn't wait to throw a leg over this two-grand beauty.

### The frame

The Capra AL's hydroformed front end is bolted to aluminium chainstays and the same carbon seatstays used on the CF, with YT's V4L four-bar suspension set-up delivering 165mm (6.5in) of rear wheel travel. A tapered head tube, 12x142mm rear axle and PF30 bottom bracket boost stiffness, cables can be routed internally or externally, and there are ISCG-05 chain guide tabs.

### The kit

The AL 1's spec list wouldn't disappoint on a bike at double or even triple the price, with top-end RockShox suspension units at both ends plus a

Reverb Stealth dropper post, DT Swiss wheels and 1x11 SRAM X1 transmission. The quality even extends to the Race Face finishing kit, SDG saddle and ODI Sensus lock-on grips. If we're being really picky, the SRAM Guide R brakes lack the Swinglink used on the pricier models and don't feel quite as good as a result, but it's still an amazing spec for the price.

### The ride

With limited time for testing, we threw the YT straight into some of the gnarliest trails we could bring ourselves to pedal to the top of. Like its wild goat namesake, the Capra makes light work of the climbs, considering its weight and 165mm (6.5in) of travel. There was no pedalling-induced nastiness going on with the suspension, just an easy spin in a comfy position. We never felt the need to fiddle with the compression damping lever on the Monarch Plus shock, leaving it to get on with smoothing out the trail as we clawed up some seriously steep inclines.

The 580mm top tube on our medium bike gave enough

reach and comfort for our 5ft 7in test rider, but we were left pining for a bit more length in the front end to increase stability on descents, simply because the Capra is capable of being ridden so fast. The slack 65-degree head angle and low bottom bracket give plenty of confidence.

Get the saddle dropped and the AL 1 up to attacking speed, and it feels more like a lightweight, easy to manoeuvre downhill rig than a trail bike. There's a huge amount of support from the shock and unquestionable predictability from the back end, and this is matched by the Solo Air Pike fork up front.

Though the Capra will certainly handle anything a trail centre can throw at it with ease, it's on harsher, bigger terrain that the AL 1 really shines. **JAKE**

### FirstRides Ratings

WE BASE OUR SCORES ON VALUE FOR MONEY AND PERFORMANCE

**EXCEPTIONAL:**  
A genuine class leader

**VERY GOOD:** One of the best you can buy

**GOOD:** It'll do the job and do it well

**BELLOW AVERAGE:**  
Flawed in some way

**POOR:** Simply put, don't bother!

RATED  
**FirstRides**

Hugely capable, great fun and with a very competitive spec, and all at a bargain price for an enduro bike



# FirstRides



↑ Merida's 140mm frame isn't new, but the geometry has been updated

↓ The mixed 1x11 drivetrain works well but we'd fit a bigger front chainring to cut bob



## MERIDA ONE-FORTY 7.900

**FRAME** Hydroformed and triple butted 6066 aluminium, 140mm (5.5in) travel **FORK** RockShox Pike RCT3 Dual Position Air, 150mm (5.9in) travel **SHOCK** Fox Float CTD BV LV Performance **DRIVETRAIN** SRAM X01 w/ X1 cassette and FSA Afterburner cranks (1x11) **WHEELSET** DT Swiss 533D rims on 370 hubs, Schwalbe Nobby Nic (front) and Rock Razor (rear) 27.5x2.35in tyres **BRAKES** Shimano Deore XT **BAR/STEM** Gravity Light OS, 760mm/Gravity Light, 45mm **SEATPOST/SADDLE** RockShox Reverb Stealth/Prologo Nago Evo X10 **WEIGHT** 13.4kg (29.6lb), size L without pedals **PRICE** £3,000 **CONTACT** Merida [www.merida-bikes.com](http://www.merida-bikes.com)

The One-Forty 7.900 sits at the top of Merida's trail range. It's wedged into the crammed 140mm (5.5in) travel trail bike market, where it faces some stiff competition. But its £3,000 price tag and Merida's extensive UK dealer network help give it some serious clout.

### The frame

Merida's 140mm frame has remained largely unchanged

for the past few years but small updates have ensured the geometry is up to date. The One-Forty has all the features you'd expect of a nippy trail bike, including 650b wheels, internal cable and dropper post routing, a tapered head tube and 142mm rear axle. The hydroformed 6066 aluminium tubes are triple butted in a bid to balance weight and strength, and smooth welded for a super-clean finish.

### The kit

The One-Forty has some impressive kit hung from its frame for the price. The RockShox Reverb Stealth dropper post and 11-speed SRAM set-up give it go-anywhere credentials, while the Pike up front is one of our favourite forks, here appearing in adjustable-travel Dual Position Air trim. We've no complaints about the dinky 45mm Gravity Light stem

either, though the matching bar does have a rather odd shape. All this bling is offset by the Performance series Fox shock, which lacks the Kashima coating and adjustability of its pricier Factory counterparts. It's a small price to pay considering the rest of the spec though.

### The ride

Any concerns we might have had about the mid-range shock were short lived – it proved impressive over small bumps and the CTD lever made it easy to adjust the low-speed compression damping to suit the trail gradient.

Our medium frame's 595mm top tube helped provide a lengthy 423mm reach, which, when matched to the 45mm stem and 67-degree head angle, gave a planted and controlled feel, especially on the descents. When that stability allowed the hooligan inside to get the best of us, the shock again

performed well, giving plenty of support and resisting bottoming out too easily. The Pike fork gave more than enough support for all but the hardest of riders too, making for easy climbing and even rowdier descending.

Weight is distributed evenly enough over the bike for it to climb well, even on technical ascents in the easiest gear – though there is a small amount of pedalling-induced bob and feedback from the rear suspension caused by the slightly rearward axle path of Merida's VPK (Virtual Pivot Kinematics) layout.

We also lost the chain a few times when pedalling through stutter-bump riddled sections – something we again put down to the chain growth caused by the axle path. Switching to a larger chainring than the 30t fitted would help with both of these problems, making one a sensible upgrade. JAKE



↑ The Performance series rear shock lacks the bling factor but works perfectly well

RATED  
**FirstRides**

Good value and tons of fun, but for technical singletrack bashing we'd change the bar and chainring



# DIRECT ADVANTAGE



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# FirstRides



↑ Out of the new Stumpy options, the carbon 29er is the one for speed fiends

↓ The large down tube has a hole cut in the top so you can stow some spares inside



## SPECIALIZED S-WORKS STUMPJUMPER FSR 29



**FRAME** FACT 9M carbon, 135mm (5.3in) travel **FORK** RockShox Pike RCT3 Solo Air, 140mm (5.5in) travel **SHOCK** Fox Float CTD RX **DRIVETRAIN** SRAM XX1 w/ Specialized S-Works carbon cranks and Mini-Guide (1x11) **WHEELSET** Roval Traverse SL Fattie 29 wheels, Specialized Butcher Control (front) and Purgatory Control (rear) 29x2.3in tyres **BRAKES** Shimano XTR Trail **BAR/STEM** Specialized S-Works All-Mountain, 750mm/Syntace Force 109, 75mm **SEATPOST/SADDLE** Specialized Command Post IRcc, Specialized Henge Expert **WEIGHT** 12.1kg (26.7lb), size L without pedals **PRICE** £6,500 **CONTACT** Specialized [www.specialized.com](http://www.specialized.com)

The Stumpjumper name is synonymous with trail bikes, having been in Specialized's line-up for 34 years. There are three full-sus FSR designs for 2016, all available now – a 650b bike, a plus-size '6Fatty' and a 29er. We got hold of the big-wheeler, in top-of-the-tree S-Works trim.

### The frame

Being an S-Works bike, the frame is a full-carbon affair,

which helps keep overall weight down to 12.1kg (26.7lb). The seatstays are now bridgeless, with the shock linkage and shuttle beefed up to maintain stiffness. This has allowed the chainstays to be shortened to a whippy 437mm. Up front, the big news is an evolution of the SWAT (storage, air, water, tools) concept launched in 2013. A door under the bottle cage lets you stash tools, pumps, tubes or food in the down tube. Spesh

say decent axle-to-axle stiffness has been maintained thanks to the new back end, and we didn't notice any undue flex in testing.

### The kit

The S-Works Stumpy's wishlist spec includes SRAM XX1 gears and Shimano XTR brakes. A Pike keeps things under control up front, and the Fox shock has been given a more progressive spring curve than on this year's Stumpy to match the support provided by the fork. Specialized provide most of the finishing kit, including their new Command Post IRcc dropper and Roval Traverse SL carbon wheels. The 30mm (internal) rims give the Butcher and Purgatory tyres plenty of volume and a square profile that helps the shoulders dig in in the turns.



↑ There's room in the down tube compartment for a tube, multi-tool and pump

rutted, rooty and rocky trails, giving ridiculous levels of grip and control whether you're blatting down the straights or railing corners. The Horst Link suspension design has been around for decades but it's still one of the best out there.

Because it remains active you can brake later into corners, and we only had to use the Climb setting on the Fox shock on steep, smooth ascents.

With a 620mm effective top tube (large size) the Stumpy may not be super-long but it's not short either and the 67.5-degree head angle lends plenty of stability at speed. The short back end means this is still a bike that likes to get out and play too. We quickly swapped the 75mm stem for a 40mm one to sharpen up the steering though. **TOM**

Rated  
**FirstRides**

If you've got deep pockets and want to go fast, the new Stumpy 29 has to be towards the top of your list





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# MBUK First Look

*Tasty bits of new kit to  
get excited about*





## SCOTT GENIUS 900 TUNED

A MORE PRECISE method of carbon allocation has enabled Scott to reduce the amount of fibre used in the Genius's frame while simultaneously strengthening it, helping to deliver one of the lightest 29er trail bikes out there – our size large bike weighs just 11.2kg (24.6lb). The 900 Tuned is packed with features – Scott's patented TwinLoc lever lets you tweak the travel and geometry on the fly, a chip in the lower shock mount adjusts the BB height and head angle, and the IDS SL dropouts will accept a variety of different hub standards. The spec includes a Fox 32 Float CTD FIT fork and Nude shock, SRAM XX1 transmission, Shimano XTR M9000 brakes, RockShox Reverb seatpost and Syncros finishing kit.

**£6,399** Scott Sports [www.scott-sports.com](http://www.scott-sports.com)

## AMPLIFI MKII KNEE PADS

**AMPLIFI ARE A** German company who make protective gear for snowboarding and mountain biking. The MKII knee pads are made from a material called Armourgel that was originally developed for the British military. It's light and flexible in general use but reacts instantly to impacts, hardening and stiffening to absorb the crash forces. The MKIIs are a low-profile, slip-on design, with Velcro straps and silicone gripper strips on the hems to keep them where they're needed.

**£60** Paligap [www.paligap.cc](http://www.paligap.cc)





## VITTORIA DEAMION WHEELS

**ITALIAN TYRE MANUFACTURERS** Vittoria have entered the wheel market with a bang, launching four MTB options – three XC offerings (including a set of carbon tubulars) and these, their burlier all-mountain/enduro wheels. The alloy rims are a decent width – 23mm internal, 28mm external – and have a patented Speedlock rim bed profile that's designed to increase support for tubeless tyres run at low pressures. They're laced to the hubs with 28 straight-pull spokes, front and rear. The hubs are XD driver compatible in case you want to run one of SRAM's 11-speed drivetrains. The Dearmons come in 650b and 29in sizes and are supplied with wheel bags. Our 650b set weighs 1,739g (808g front, 931g rear).

**£449** Fisher Outdoor Leisure  
[www.fisheroutdoor.co.uk](http://www.fisheroutdoor.co.uk)

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## 7iDP M1 HELMET

**THE CAPABILITY OF** today's trail bikes means bike parks are no longer just the domain of hardcore downhillers and freeriders. A decent full-face lid is essential for this type of riding, but they can be expensive. Thankfully modern manufacturing techniques are delivering some cheaper alternatives, such as this number from 7iDP. With a polycarbonate shell, adjustable peak, 12 vents and four colour options, it could be just the ticket for your next trip to the bike park. It meets CPSC and CE safety standards.

**£69.99** Decade Europe

[www.decade-europe.com](http://www.decade-europe.com)

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# SuperBike

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MBUK

#56 Cube Elite C68 SL 29



## WHY IS THIS A SUPER BIKE?

- RockShox's unique, genre-busting RS-1 fork can be locked out at the touch of a button for super-efficient pedalling
- Ultralight 9.2kg build means you can zip through trees and up the climbs at pace
- Race-focused spec includes 'stealth' dropper post for tackling technical descents

## Eyes on the prize

Cube's carbon 29er hardtail is built for one job only – winning races

With all the fuss over enduro – and the hard-to-ignore fact that big-hitting full-sussers are selling pretty much as fast as manufacturers can make them – you'd be forgiven for thinking that everyone's forgotten cross-country racing. Not so. An acquired taste it may be, but riding flat out and head-to-head uphill as well as downhill

is what drove early mountain bike development and it still has an influence today, especially when it comes to shaving grams. And race bikes don't come much lighter than the Cube Elite C68 SL 29, which tips the scales at a scant 9.2kg (20.3lb).

The name may not trip off the tongue, but this is an ultra-lightweight rocketship of a

bike that leaves the rider with no excuses for not getting on the podium. It isn't actually the lightest or most expensive bike in Cube's Elite C68 29er range – that honour goes to the SLT, which adds Shimano's XTR Di2 – electronic groupset and 50 per cent to the price tag while shaving just 100g from the claimed weight. But the £3,999 SL

### COMFORT = SPEED

Stiffer isn't always better. Moving the rear brake mount to the chainstay meant Cube's engineers were able to remove material from the seatstays, saving weight and improving comfort over rough terrain, which should mean less fatigue towards the end of a race.

### DROPPING IN

Fitting a dropper seatpost to a race bike adds a couple of hundred grams but Cube reckon the improved handling on rough courses and technical descents adds enough speed to outweigh the small bit of extra weight to be carted around.

### TIME FOR A CHANGE

Through-axles are good for improving frame stiffness but can be fiddly to use. Syntace's tapered X-12 system adds axle guides to the rear dropouts to speed up mid-race wheel changes.

### STIFF DOWN BELOW

XC races are won on the climbs, so a bike that translates every ounce of a rider's effort into forward progress is what's needed. A press-fit bottom bracket – where the bearings are pressed directly into the frame – allows a wider, stiffer structure around the area that's most stressed under hard pedalling loads.

**LEAN AND MEAN**

Shaving grams wherever possible helps the rider to extract maximum performance from a frame like this. Cube's attention to detail is fanatical in this area – they've even replaced standard frame decals with a multi-layer wet paint process to save a few more grams.

shares the same cutting-edge carbon fibre frame, decked out with a full complement of SRAM's top-end goodies.

**Podium machine**

Hardtails don't get much press these days, so it's easy to forget that there's more to building a fast, light and efficient chassis than joining the dots between the wheels, crankset, saddle and handlebar. Cube's designers have thrown all their knowhow at the Elite C68 frame. Naturally it's made from carbon fibre – a material that's ideal for bikes like this where low weight, high stiffness and reasonable comfort are all needed. And in a bid to reduce weight even further, the proportion of fibre in the composite has been increased from the 60 per cent typically found in carbon bike frames to 68 per cent. That may sound like a trivial difference, but since fibres are lighter than the resin that binds them together, it's enough to bring down the overall weight of the frame.

This obsession with shaving grams continues into details like the post mount for the rear brake calliper. This saves weight compared to an IS mount (which would require an adaptor and two additional bolts, adding 30g), and because it's mounted on the chainstay, Cube's engineers have been able to trim some fat from the seatstays, improving ride comfort in the process. Even racers appreciate a supple ride, because it helps increase speed and reduce fatigue.

**SRAM-packed spec**

Headlining the spec sheet is RockShox's RS-1 fork. Eye-wateringly expensive (it'll set you back over £1,400 on its own), the distinctive looks of this inverted design set it apart from the rest of the XC race fork crowd. It was developed to mark the 25th anniversary of the original RockShox RS-1, which had just 50mm of travel but helped riders to both XC and DH wins at the 1990 World Championships. A one-piece steerer, crown and upper leg set-up shaves weight and maximises stiffness, while the upside-down layout is made possible by a proprietary oversized 'Predictive Steering' front hub and Maxle Ultimate through-axle.

Gearheads will appreciate SRAM's slick-shifting, precise and light 1x11 XX1 groupset. One spec detail that's easy to miss is the KS LEV Integra seatpost. A dropper post on an XC race bike? You bet. Although it adds a little weight, the ability to quickly and easily get the rider's weight lower on steep descents and through technical sections adds speed. And since all-out pace is what a bike like this is all about, the extra grammage is a small price to pay. ☀

**THE ESSENTIALS**

**PRICE:** £3,999 (complete bike)

**CONTACT:** [www.cube.eu](http://www.cube.eu)

**ALSO LOOK AT:** Trek Superfly 9.9 SL XX1, £5,800, [www.trekbikes.com](http://www.trekbikes.com)

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A wide-angle photograph of a rugged coastal landscape. In the foreground, a person wearing a red jacket and green pants is riding a mountain bike up a rocky, grassy slope. The trail is marked by a single wooden post. To the right, the ocean with white-capped waves meets the shore. In the background, rolling hills and mountains are visible under a cloudy sky.

# TRAIL PIRATES

Ahoy, me hearties! We go a-plundering  
the Mediterranean's best kept secret,  
but it's no easy ride...

Words and pics Dan Milner »





One false move and a salty death awaits



This is a very different experience to most people's idea of a holiday on Menorca



Navigation isn't tricky – the Camí de Cavalls is clearly waymarked

**T**owering waves smash into the rocks below me. I peer down from the cliff edge, through air thick with sea spray, and am mesmerised by the violent scene below. I immediately realise that was a stupid thing to do – now I have to battle the fear of falling to a salty death. I guess I should have considered my vertigo before committing to ride nearly 200km of trail perched high up on sea cliffs. My eyes trace the singletrack ahead as it dips and rolls along the cliff-tops until it disappears over a small rise. If I survive until that point, I'll be rewarded with yet another descent down to yet another deserted sandy beach.

### Oh my giddy aunt

Giddy heights and skinny singletrack are the main ingredients of the ride so far, but I'm only on day one of a four-day epic, riding the waymarked Camí de Cavalls trail that circumnavigates the Spanish island of Menorca. The scenery is varied, with turquoise bays, white sandy beaches and dark oak forests. The Camí de Cavalls is an ancient path that connects 16th century stone towers once used to watch for marauding pirates. Its refurbishment as the GR223 long-distance route opened it up to mountain bikers, walkers and horse riders, and the promise of great riding has lured me, along with Marin rider Julia Hofmann and Scott rider Karen Eller, to explore its treasures.

The island's many beaches draw holidaymakers, but Menorca is lesser known among mountain bikers. With neighbouring Mallorca boasting 1,400m-high mountains, how can Menorca's 358m high point compete? Fortunately the Camí de

**Steep descents and rocky drop-offs blend with fast rolling singletrack to keep the endorphins flowing**

Cavalls hides hundreds of descents as it hugs the crinkly coastline. It cuts across headlands, climbs steep bedrock staircases and drops down fast, swooping descents. By the time we emerge from our four-day epic we'll have descended a brake-burning 3,700m.

### Climb, descend, repeat

Mahon is the first city in Spain to see the sun rise, but as we ride out of the island's capital it's obscured by storm clouds. Full of the anxious anticipation that salutes the start of unfamiliar rides, we pedal to the start of the trail at Sa Mesquida. Our rear wheels spit gravel as we grind up our first short climb past vibrant green meadows, before launching into a flowing descent to a deserted sandy bay. And so the pattern is set for the next four days – climb, descend, repeat.

Steep descents and rocky drop-offs blend with fast rolling singletrack to keep the endorphins flowing, while technical climbs appear round corners to test mental resolve and gear-shifting technique. Over every crest in the trail looms another spectacular hidden cove or dramatic seascape. We bounce down wooden staircases to push our bikes across vast, empty beaches and pedal along elevated boardwalks that hover over salt marshes. Herons, white ibis and black-winged stilts wade through the brackish water.

When the Cap de Favàritx lighthouse comes into view we reach the north coast and are slammed by the wind. Luckily the trail leads into the shelter of a forest. We've been riding for four hours but we're only half way through the day's 45km target. "Underestimating the challenges of the trail is the biggest mistake riders make," says Joan Febrer Torres, who runs guiding company CamiDeCavalls360.com.

When we make our way into our first overnight stop at Ses Salinas we aren't surprised to find we've already climbed 1,225m. Our exhaustion has been increased by the 15kg of clothes,

#### ESSENTIAL INFO

### FACTS AND FIGURES

The Camí de Cavalls can be ridden at any time of the year, but accommodation and restaurant options are limited between December and April. Easter is when Menorca's season begins and you're more likely to find direct flights to the island then too. Mahon's airport is a 10-minute taxi ride (€18 with bike) from the city centre.

You can ride the Camí de Cavalls in either direction, starting wherever you want. We began and finished in Mahon, riding it in four days. Riding it in five or six stages would allow more time to enjoy any of the 216 beaches en route, and the sea is warm enough to swim in

between May and October. We stayed in Mahon at the start and Es Castell at the end of our ride (from €50, [www.artiemhotels.com](http://www.artiemhotels.com)), in Ses Salinas on day one (from €30 B&B, [www.hostalportfornells.com](http://www.hostalportfornells.com)), in Ciutadella on day two (from €35 B&B, [www.sethotels.com](http://www.sethotels.com)) and in Santo Tomás on day three (from €25, [www.hamiltoncourt.com](http://www.hamiltoncourt.com)).

Camidécavalls360.com offers different levels of support, with packages starting at €280 for four nights' accommodation with daily bag transfer, a detailed route book, map and GPS info. They also offer bike rental from €21 per day.



**It's been a tough two hours of hike-a-bike climbs, but we've been left buzzing**



There's a bit of hike-a-biking, but it's always worth it!

water, food, cameras and trail spares we're each carrying. "Are you sure you know what lies ahead?" asks Daniel, the owner of our accommodation, next morning, eyeing my backpack. "Because I think for this section you'll be walking all of it!" Daniel's concern is over a 9km length of the trail near Binimel-la that is, apparently, an unrelenting set of unridable climbs and descents. He thrusts enormous sandwiches into our hands before cheerfully saying, "Good luck!"

We appreciate this sustenance on the hill above Els Alocs, sitting in the shadow of a 3,000-year-old stone tower. The reputedly hardest section of the Camí de Cavalls is now behind us. Admittedly, it's been a tough two hours of hike-a-bike climbs, but we've been left buzzing. Maybe it's because we were psychologically prepared for worse, or maybe because the hikes were mercifully only 15 minutes long and each fed us a rideable rock garden descent, but we've a sense of achievement.

### And not a drop to drink

When we reach Cala Morell, a fairly sizable village on the map, we find the only sign of life is the renovation of holiday apartments. We're left to ride the jagged, limestone plateau past Punta Nati to Ciutadella with empty hydration reservoirs. Ciutadella was Menorca's original capital until the British moved it east to Mahon in the 1700s, and next morning we ride out along its old flagstone streets. We refuelled on tapas and Rioja the night before, but nearly 3,000m of climbing has left us wilting. We're now half way around the island and the surprises and rewards have come so thick and fast they've left my head a whirlwind of plunging sea cliffs and isolated stony coves.

Just as we're getting to grips with the wild, open feel, there's a sudden change. The next two days feel like a completely different island – one of »



The scenery is spectacular throughout, and some parts feel really wild and remote



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**The last two days feel like a different island – one of tough bedrock trails and archetypal Mediterranean blue coves**

tough bedrock trails and archetypal Mediterranean blue coves. Ciutadella's whitewashed suburbs yield to a fast, flowing stretch of singletrack that pops out at the island's south-west corner. The sun is out, the wind has dropped and the distant rugged outline of Mallorca hovers over a calm sea. We've covered half the day's 48km in two hours, and a look at my altimeter says we've climbed a mere 40m. We're being lulled into a false sense of ease.

### Sea urchin punctures

We push across white sandy beaches lapped by azure waters and pump our bikes across rocky shorelines, wary of puncturing on a sea urchin. The constantly evolving Camí de Cavalls continues to surprise, and our afternoon becomes one of steep climbs and descents as the trail cuts across wide gorges that slice through the island from north to south. When we pull up in Sant Tomàs for our third night, we've squeezed in an additional grin-inducing 600m of downhill.

We're welcomed to our apartment by the smiling face of Jesus Florez Fernandez. We're six weeks too early for this seaside resort to be open but Jesus has made an exception for us. As with everyone we meet along the way, he's proud that we've come to ride the Camí de Cavalls and can't do enough for us. He arranges a taxi to take us to the nearby village of Es Migjorn Gran for a well-earned meal washed down with several cold cervezas.

As we progress along the south coast the trail deviates from the sea, leading us in and out of oak forest littered with smooth natural steps that are kept slick by the shade of the trees. We weave past red caves and between groves of almond trees, their boughs thick with pink blossom. We claw our way through Cala en Porter, past an Irish pub. This



One final trail before some well-earned Rioja and tapas

is the other side of Menorca – beach towels and nightclubs. Suddenly we're plunged into a steep technical descent that refocuses our attention.

We hit the sea again for the last thrust north back to Mahon, along a 14km stretch of trail that's as varied as the previous three days. In places it cuts a smooth orange ribbon across vivid green fields, and in others becomes a challenging rocky cart track pinned between high dry stone walls.

As we pedal past the Torre de Penjat, the last of the old watchtowers we'll see on our ride, I think of the pirates of years gone by, of the ancient trail we've followed and the technology-smothered carbon bike I'm riding. Could I outpace a pirate if one appeared now? We've just ridden 180km of trail with a whopping 3,700m of ascent and descent – not bad for a 'flat' island. No, I reckon I'd be walking the plank before sunset. ☀

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# Taming the beast

Can our resident human cannonball Ric McLaughlin safely navigate the UK's meanest DH track? We filled out some forms and shoved him into a gondola to find out

Words Ric McLaughlin Pics Andy McCandlish



# ANYTHING THAT APPEARS TO BE THE OBVIOUS LINE THROUGH THE ROCKS PROMPTLY CUL-DE-SACS INTO A DEAD END OR AWKWARD DROP



You're right up in real mountains, starting at 655m above sea level



No easy looking lines through this little lot

Last man down  
the hill, bidding for  
World Cup glory...  
dream on, Ric!



BE A HERO

## RIDE THE TRACK

Both the World Cup DH track and the Red Giant trail bike descent are open from mid May to mid September. The cost of a single gondola trip is steep at £13.50, but a day pass is £31, with further discounts for multiple days and season tickets. The gondola runs 10.15am – 3.45pm but it's a good idea to phone ahead to check it's open.

You have to fill in a form that basically absolves Nevis Range from responsibility and acknowledges that you're aware of the risks, and have in fact ridden a bike before. This is an extremely steep and difficult track with 555m of vertical descent in 2.82km, and plenty of potential to do you damage, so take your time to get used to it.

Steep, awkward rocks. Ric wishes he was back on that gondola



**W**ind and rain are rocking the gondola gently. Below me, the top section of Fort William's Downhill World Cup track snakes down the copper coloured hillside like some kind of horrifying, slippery rock serpent. My task is simple – I just have to unload my bike from the lift and somehow make it back to my car in one piece.

For the best part of a decade I've travelled up the A82 to watch the Scottish round of the UCI World Cup and stood on this hillside. I've gaped at Danny Hart's lines, braved the flesh-stripping midges of the woods to watch Brendan Fairclough tame their roots and felt the roar of the finish line crowds rise up through my boots. But I've never ridden the track.

In Britain we're always quick to bemoan our lack of ski lift accessible riding but here, in this western corner of the Highlands, you can cough up the equivalent cost of an uplift day for a gondola ticket and pit yourself against one of the world's most infamous tracks. But can Joe Average (me) tame this savage beast? Only time, effort and possibly a few grams of flesh will tell.

### Eye of the storm

All of a sudden the noise stops. Pushing my bike into the famous eye-shaped start hut on the top of Aonach Mor is emotive enough, but the shelter from the meteorological battering that it provides brings an odd air of quiet. A small sign highlights that this isn't a forest walk. The top section of the track stretches out in front of me before dipping out of view in the distance. The small team of people shovelling gravel on to the track are bracing themselves against the wind at almost 45 degrees.

Pedalling out of the start hut, it's hard not to be transported into a fantasy world. For the briefest of milliseconds I'm the last man on the hill making my bid for World Cup glory. Then I try to clear the first left-hand hip jump and nearly get blown off the track the moment my wheels leave the ground. It's

pretty focusing. My smile is soon firmly back in place as the opening turns flip my bike from left to right, building speed all the time. The corners are wide and supportive, and I'm soon in top gear, managing to put in a couple of pedal strokes in between turns.

The first few duckboard sections pass with a loud buzz, and even though I'm nowhere near World Cup pace it's easy to see why the riders love this track – this bit is fast and has plenty of flow without having that much to think about.

### Into the rocks

Just as the rocks underneath me begin to increase in size and number, so too does the amount of porridge-like dust. If you've never seen modern mountain bike racing, the first steep rock section at Fort William is one of the best places to watch it. It's long and lumpy with plenty of tricky edges and off-camber slants. One of which I promptly find and get spat off the side of the bike and straight on to my back. Luckily there's no damage done bar a scuff on the handlebar, but it's a reminder that this isn't a flicky-flacky trail centre blue route.

Back on the bike again and the sheer number of line choices through the big rock sections is staggering. Anything that appears to be the obvious line promptly cul-de-sacs into a dead end or awkward drop. The Devinci Wilson downhill bike I'm sat on is doing a lot of the work for me here and gobbling up my mistakes, but the flat-out flow of the previous section feels like a million miles away.

Thankfully, as I've ducked beneath the ridgeline the wind has all but stopped – for now. Bar a few more sections of sticky porridge, I'm able clip on, slowly getting the hang of spotting the lines through the exposed rock slabs. Despite their slick coating, there's plenty of grip underneath.

Fort William is one of those tracks where, just as you start to feel comfortable, another obstacle appears, requiring some pretty committed bike riding. When the Deer Gate looms into view my forearms heave a sigh »



of relief. The gap in the fence denotes a subtle shift in terrain, from 'brutal' to 'slightly less brutal'. The rock sections that follow are steep and potentially treacherous, but carrying speed into them helps the bike to skim over their knuckles and crags.

### Slick Ric

The track starts to darken as the woods begin their slow creep in, and then all of a sudden I meet what looks like a wall of trees. Skidding to a halt, I take a look down into the famously steep wooded section. There appear to be three line choices, each of which is far from obvious and far from easy. I hop back on the bike and skid like a muppet down the central one aiming for a lump of granite at the bottom, all the time trying to ignore just how slick the roots ahead look. It feels bizarre to be tip-toeing through roots after spending so long battering through rocks.

Exiting the woods, the first of the track's two key drop-offs

marks the beginning of the end of my World Cup track experience. The Hazzard Hoofer – the Dudes of Hazzard sponsored stream gap – is fenced off (as is the road gap), but I do get one final shot at glory as I take on the tabletop at the base of the monstrous Silverline Tools wallride. Riding flat-out into the woods, my run ends underneath the gondola on the freshly laid surface of the Hip Replacement jump, which catapults riders into the high-speed wall of noise that is the finish arena.

I head down the 4X track before linking back onto the finishing straight, lofting off the final drop and rolling down to the invisible line that continues to make and break heroes.

My arms and brain feel like they're in tatters and a gentle throbbing from my left shin tells me that I'm leaking after my roll-around up top, but what a track. The allure of this grande dame of World Cup tracks is

obvious, as is its malevolence. Taming this beast requires everything in a pro rider's skill set, and on top of that the vast majority of it is exposed to the elements. Virtually every section has something capable of writing off a bike, so a truly great run, even at top level, must be the rarest of rare things. ☀

## Getting there

### Nevis Range, Fort William

**By car:** From Inverness head south on the A82 along the edge of Loch Ness and you can't miss it – the centre is off a junction on your left and is well signposted. From Glasgow, again you'll be on the stunning A82 but heading north. Follow the signposts through Fort William for Inverness and the centre is on your right.

**By train:** There's an overnight sleeper service from London all the way to Fort William. Due to its relatively large size, Fort William is also pretty well serviced from most major Scottish stations. Bring your bike and ride the seven miles from the station to the Nevis Range centre.

**Contact:** [www.nevisrange.co.uk](http://www.nevisrange.co.uk), 01397 705825

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Peebles is overrun by mountain bikers for the two weeks of the festival



# FEELING THE LOVE

We hit the road to Scotland to check out the TweedLove festival and round 3 of the 2015 Enduro World Series

Words Alex Evans Pics Andy McCandlish

**T**o anyone expecting a stereotypical Scotland of craggy peaks, bagpipes and deep-fried confectionary, the welcoming peacefulness and lush rolling hills of the Tweed Valley come as a bit of a shock. Battered Mars bars are the last thing you'd associate with this area, though we're assured they're available in the local chippy... We're here in Peebles, a quiet town just down the road from the 7stanes trail centre at Glentress Forest, for one of the most diverse events on the mountain biking calendar – TweedLove. Summed up as "two weeks of riding bikes and good times", it's the perfect excuse to take some time off work, enjoy some Scottish hospitality and go play on your bike with like-minded people on some of the best natural trails on offer anywhere in the world.

For these two weeks, Peebles and Innerleithen – another 7stanes centre six miles up the valley – embrace the festival and the massively diverse cross-section of people it brings. Red TweedLove banners line the roadsides, every B&B, hotel and campsite for miles around is jam-packed with competitors, and the giant expo area takes over the green in the centre of Peebles. The valley plays host to concerts, parties, bivvy bag adventures and the jewel in the festival's crown, a round of the Enduro World Series (EWS).

## Need for Tweed

There are vast riding possibilities in the area, with mile upon mile of singletrack and forest track in addition to the waymarked routes at

»





## TWEEDLOVE KITLIST

**Take these eight essentials to stay stoked for longer**

**Midge repellent** Avon's Skin So Soft spray is the Tweed Valley locals' secret weapon.

**Good waterproofs** It's important to stay warm and dry when you're out in the hills.

**Good food, and lots of it** Pasta, sandwiches, dried fruit and water will help keep you going during those long, fun-filled days.

**Basic tools** Allen keys and a pump are a must to keep your bike running.

**Spares** Inner tubes and zip ties are essential in case the worst happens.

**The right bike for the job** An enduro bike with good downhill capabilities will help you get the most enjoyment from the technical trails.

**Beer** To keep the good times rolling and help you recover after a long day's riding.

**Your best mates** For eternal laughs and banter.

The festival may be all about fun but the racing is deadly serious for the top competitors



Trek's Tracy Moseley continued her winning streak at EWS round 3



Justin Leov took a well-deserved win in the men's race





Glentress and Innerleithen. The off-piste trails used for the EWS have been likened to some of the gnarliest descents in the Alps – steep, rooty, rutted sections of finest Scottish loam that beckon your wheels to be tortured and twisted as you speed from top to bottom. If you enjoy riding snarled up singletrack, you're spoiled for choice. Equally, if preened ribbons of grey trail centre joy are more your thing, look no further.

The festival is just as diverse as the trails – an exciting melting pot of bike riding, where the pros hang out with young kids, giving them inspiration and riding tips ahead of the racing. At Downhill World Cup races there's a shroud of professionalism surrounding the top riders. This is broken down at the EWS because, at the end of the day, enduro racing is going for a bike ride with your mates – something that the youngest, oldest, newest and most experienced riders can all identify with. The EWS racers cover a staggering 62km over the weekend, including 3,000m of climbing. In the evenings, stories of dodgy line choices, sketchy racing moments and tired legs are shared around somewhat soggy campfires.

Sunday's after-party, The Love Club, is a well-deserved celebration of all things mountain biking, where injury sorrow and race result disappointment are drowned with a bottle of the trail ale brewed especially for the event, and great results and successful completion of the gruelling EWS are toasted with that same beer. TweedLove encapsulates everything that's great about mountain biking. This diverse event with its incredible trails and great atmosphere should be added to any mountain biker's 'to do' list. ☀

## Stories of dodgy line choices are shared around campfires



### THE RACER'S VIEW

#### What it's like to take part in the EWS

"For such a major event, the Enduro World Series is one of the most relaxed races I've ever had the pleasure of doing," says keen privateer racer Ben Raynor. "Competitors came from every corner of the world to sample the Scottish soil, yet everyone was more than happy to discuss the race out on the trails."

Day one's racing took place in the hills around Innerleithen. "Stage 1 used a part of the XC descent and some freshly cut loamy sections in the woods. Stage 2 was a classic DH track finishing in the main arena. Stage 3 was a lot of people's favourite, freshly constructed for the EWS and a stage for the downhills to shine on, sending stoke levels soaring."

On day two the action moved up the valley to Peebles. "The stages were more physical and rewarded the stronger and fitter riders. Stage 8 in particular was a lungbuster – 6km of leg-punishing pedalling was lengthened with a new top section, making it a 12-minute stage for the winner and 14 minutes for most others! Luckily the crowd were cheering you on all the way, even when you thought you could pedal no more!"

Andrew **NEETHLING**  
2015 UCI World Cup #1 - Lourdes

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10 THINGS TO TRY IN 2015

5

# RIDE TO WORK

Improve your fitness and bike skills – commute your way to being a trail riding god!

## DO THE MATH(S)



It's easy not to be bothered with the 'hassle' of riding in the mornings, but even if your commute is just five miles that adds up to 10 miles a day. 50

per week... Commuting offers you a chance to gain free fitness – kiss goodbye to feeling wrecked before the last descent on trail rides!

## PLAN YOUR ROUTES

Don't confine your commute to a strip of tarmac – unleash some science! Plot your house and place of work on Google Maps, switch on the satellite view and take a look from above. While roads are the obvious way to get quickly from A to B, shortcuts through estates or parks not only add some interest but could also cut time from your commute.

## SMELL SWEET



If you ride to work you'll sweat, and who wants to sit beside a stinky mess? If you don't have showers at the office, invest in some Muc-Off Dry Shower and deodorant to stop you smelling like a vinegar-soaked sock. Also, don't dry out your cycling shorts' chamois on the partition with a colleague's desk – trust us on this one.

## COMMUTING KIT

Invest in some basic equipment to make your journeys easier



### Lights

These needn't be expensive – you simply need to be seen, so check out clip-on commuting lights.



### Lock

If you carry a decent lock it'll open up the chance for a morning coffee stop or evening pint break.



### Inner tube

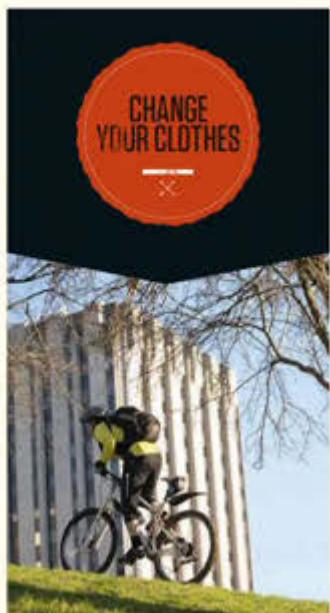
Even if you run tubeless, carry a spare tube – if the worst happens you'll still get to work on time.



### A bell

If your commute takes in a canal path or open parkland, let other riders and pedestrians know you're coming.





**Don't be fooled into the old 'I'll just wear my work clothes in' trap. Putting on riding kit will not only get you into the mindset for proper riding but also eliminate the need to sit in soaking wet pants for the rest of the day. A decent sized riding pack can easily accommodate trousers, a shirt/T-shirt, pants and socks, and bigger items like shoes and jackets can just live at work.**



Unless you live right in the urban jungle, try to incorporate some off-road into your journey to work – it'll hardly

feel like you're commuting then. Why not plan a longer loop that takes in some local singletrack on a Friday, to get the legs warmed up for riding on the weekend? Keeping your commute varied will stop you getting bored and also help hone your technical skills if you take in a range of terrain.



**Training for a race or just want to beat your mates? Focus on practising basic techniques at least once per ride and your trail pace will shoot through the roof. Trackstands, wheelies, bunnyhops – they can all be built into your ride to work and will pay off big time when it comes to tackling singletrack. Try these...**

#### STEPS

Sets of steps can ape long, chattery root sections or rocky step-downs. Practise absorbing them with your body, and test your braking control.



#### SPRINTS

Powering away from the lights can help you tune in reaction times and build muscle. Try using different gears to find your true pace.



#### HIT YOUR LINES

If some of your commute is on off-road trails, it's a great chance to try different lines and see which is the fastest.



Even if your commute is a long, flat spin on a cyclepath, it's amazing just how much added pace can be gleaned from good pedalling technique

#### Cadence

Think about what it feels like to drive a car in too low a gear. Could you improve your efficiency by selecting a slightly easier gear?

#### Spin circles

Smooth pedalling action takes a lot more thought than you'd imagine. Don't just mash the down strokes – spin complete, smooth circles.

#### Clip in

Even if you're a diehard flat pedal rider, clipping in for your commute will shave time and improve your pedalling technique.



#### NEXT ISSUE

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# RIPPING RETREAT

*Is it possible to combine the two, often conflicting, loves of your life – family and mountain biking – in a single holiday? We headed to the Forest of Dean to find out*

**Words and pics** Chris Davison



## MBUK discount! Forest Holidays

We stayed with Forest Holidays in the Forest of Dean. They have nine locations, stretching from Cornwall to Scotland, all with luxury woodland cabins and family activities on site. Use the discount code MBUK and book before the end of August to get 10 per cent off any holiday until 31 December 2016.  
[www.forestholidays.co.uk](http://www.forestholidays.co.uk)

**M**ountain bikers' other halves have to put up with a lot. We disappear off for hours, sometimes even days, with our bikes and riding buddies, and leave muddy clothes and kit strewn around the house. So it's understandable that when it comes to going on holiday together, partners often put their foot down and issue a 'no bikes' rule. But for mountain bikers, a holiday without any riding just isn't a proper holiday.

This got me thinking – would it be possible to organise a 'covert' biking holiday that kept all family members happy? After some research and a few stealthy email exchanges, a plan was hatched. I announced I was taking the family away for a three-night break in a luxury forest lodge in the heart of the Forest of Dean, which also 'apparently' had some bike trails nearby. While my eldest daughter Lily flicked through

the glossy brochure reading about the beauty treatments and on-site pizza delivery, nine-year-old Ruby looked up the info on the nearby bike trails and acknowledged her approval with a sly wink.

Many lists and much packing later, we were ready to go – complete with my and Ruby's bikes on the back of the car. When we arrived at our lodge I could see all was going to plan, with Lily and my wife Julie happily typing in wi-fi codes and checking out our private hot tub. Result!

### Partner in crime

The next morning I awoke early to shards of sunshine creeping across the bedroom floor. I grabbed the kit I'd carefully laid out the night before and quietly got ready. Ruby heard me stirring and was thinking the same thing – time for a sneaky morning ride. We left a note saying 'Gone to explore, back for breakfast' and crept out of the lodge, drinking in that

sweet, fresh morning air you only find in forests.

The Forest of Dean is strewn with paths and trails. Now and again we'd come to a sign and wonder which way to go, each time choosing whichever route looked the most fun. Caught in the moment, we suddenly realised the time and retraced our tracks back to the lodge, where the other two were just waking up. Once everybody was ready we went to the centre's forest retreat for breakfast and a family pow-wow to decide how we'd spend the weekend.

We agreed to do outdoor activities on Saturday and keep Sunday free for shopping and tea shops, to keep both factions of the family happy. During my planning I'd cunningly found somewhere near the Pedalabikeaway bike centre that would entertain my wife and daughter number one while Ruby and I hit the trails – Beechenhurst Lodge, a Forestry Commission visitor site complete with sculpture trail,





Having a kid who rides makes it much easier to sneak off for a couple of hours

play area and, most importantly, a cafe with coffee and cake.

While the non-riders merrily wandered the short distance from the trail centre to the Lodge, Ruby and I hit the saddle. The Forest of Dean was her first taste of a proper trail centre, and it put her well out of her comfort zone. Feeling disheartened, we made our way back to the cafe for consolation by cake. Then Ruby spotted a familiar face. Downhill world champ Manon Carpenter – who hails from nearby Caerphilly – was in the car park chatting with 4X world champ and Forest of Dean local Katy Curd in a break between DH runs. Last year Manon supported a charity ride. Ruby was involved with so we popped over to say hi.

### Dinner of champions

Upon hearing of Ruby's confidence issues, both women stepped up like the champs they are and offered to help out. After an hour's coaching, Ruby was riding things that made me as

## We left a note saying, 'Gone to explore, back for breakfast' and crept out of the lodge

a parent cringe, and with her confidence recharged and a twinkle in her eye, the girls bid us farewell. We returned to the car tired but buzzing, met the others and headed back to the lodge to order in some well-earned (in our case) pizzas.

The next morning I awoke with a slightly heavy heart, remembering we had a day of shopping ahead of us. Luckily, Sunday opening hours meant Ruby and I still had a window of opportunity. We quietly got ready but needed an excuse to go out again, after spending practically the whole previous day riding. Milk, suggested

### Breaks for bikers

Cabins, chapels, containers



As well as the Forest of Dean site we stayed at, Forest Holidays have luxury lodges within an easy drive of the trails at Dalby Forest in Yorkshire (Cropton, Keldy), Sherwood Pines near Nottingham (Sherwood Forest) and Thetford in Norfolk (Thorpe Forest) – all ideal for some sneaky biking!



Like the sound of a self-catered family holiday with a bit of biking on the side but fancy something quirkier? How about a five-star converted chapel? Depotrd Afan ([www.depotrd.co.uk](http://www.depotrd.co.uk)) sleeps 12, and while you ride the trails at Afan and Glyncorrwg, your family can relax or hit the shops in Cardiff.



Or how about staying in a Snoozebox – a private room in a converted shipping container – at Cornwall's Eden Project ([www.edenproject.com](http://www.edenproject.com))? There are trails at nearby Lanhydrock and Cardinham Woods, and Trailmunki are offering 33 per cent off bike hire if you quote the code 'mbuk'.





You may not be lucky enough to bump into two world champs like Ruby did, but riding always beats shopping!

## We needed an excuse to get out. Milk, suggested Ruby – we could say we'd spilled it. Genius!

Ruby – we could say we'd spilled it and needed to get some more. Genius! After washing the last of the milk down the plughole we headed out for a quick blast around the nearby trails, remembering to pick up some milk on our return.

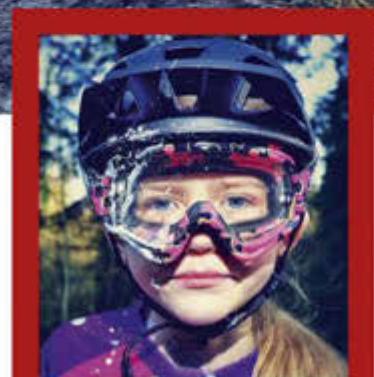
The non-riding half of the family had picked Gloucester as the city to visit – Lily had been doing her research too, and the afternoon rightly belonged to her. Several hours later and a dozen or so bags heavier, we pulled into the forest retreat car park ready for a much-needed coffee. While Julie and I topped up our caffeine reserves, the girls got involved in a Forest Holidays favourite – making

chocolate pizzas. That evening we sat in the hot tub under the stars contemplating what to do on our last day. “We could go for a family bike ride,” I suggested tentatively.

### Easy riders

The next morning, a make or break moment lay ahead of us – Julie and Lily had agreed to the ride, with a little convincing, and we were about to venture into uncharted territory. There was an uneasy silence as we queued at the bike hire counter. After an awkward clunking of gears and wobble of wheels, we all set off.

The family trail at the Forest of Dean is a flat, wide path that put the new riders at ease quicker than they'd expected. Before long, speed picked up, bodies visibly relaxed and confident grins started to appear. We returned the bikes without a single incident or meltdown and smiles all round. It seems you can have it your own way – just as long as you let your nearest and dearest have their way too. ☀



### Ruby's charity challenge

Turn your little nipper into a little ripper!

Chris's daughter Ruby raised £500 for Cancer Research UK and Help For Heroes last year by riding 100 miles during the summer holidays. This year she's launched Ruby's Big Bike Challenge in a bid to get other kids out on the trails. The plan is to organise some group rides and get some special guests along. If you have kids or are part of a mountain bike club that has young riders, head over to [www.facebook.com/rubysbigbikchallenge](http://www.facebook.com/rubysbigbikchallenge) for details. Ruby is also working on a campaign with the Forestry Commission that'll launch in early 2016.

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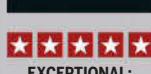
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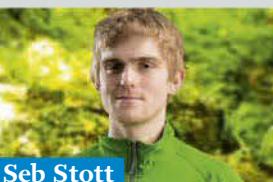
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## MBUK Test Team



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With two decades of riding and racing experience, Rob knows what works and what doesn't...



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Gravity-loving Olly has been riding long enough to know what he wants and won't settle for second best



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James Blackwell

Short and fast, pinned or binned, Art Editor Jameer has been testing kit longer than he'll happily admit to



Jake Ireland

Jake spends every day riding, and his injury list proves he's pushing the limits to provide the very best testing



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## Ibis 941 carbon wheels

£1,299 **2pure** [www.2pure.co.uk](http://www.2pure.co.uk)

**THE TREND TOWARDS** wider rims is gaining traction, and with a 35mm internal width these 29er wheels from Ibis really push the envelope. The broad carbon rims are combined with 32 J-bend spokes to provide enormous stiffness. This helps eliminate the vague feeling 29ers sometimes suffer from – our test bed bike had a crisp and precise feel when thrown into catch berms or angled rock sections.

Because of the stable base provided by the wide rims we

found we could run our tyres at slightly lower pressures than usual. The tyres still felt glued to the rims and we didn't burp any tubeless sealant. The sturdy, bead-hook-less rim resisted denting too, despite some puncture-inducing impacts.

A tyre with a round profile and stiff sidewalls is the key to unlocking the 941s' low-pressure potential – otherwise you can expect some squirming when cornering hard. We found that Maxxis's Minion DHF provided

huge grip when run at sub 20psi, while Specialized's squarer profile, single ply Butcher Control couldn't be run anywhere near as low without the shoulder tread lurching in the turns. This means the range of suitable tyres for wide rims is limited. For now... **SEB**

**MBUK**  
Usefully stiff super-wide 29er wheels that allow lower pressures for higher traction – with the right tyres



## CrankBrothers Iodine 11 handlebar

£139.99 **Extra UK** [www.extrauk.co.uk](http://www.extrauk.co.uk)

**THE IODINE IS** only available with a fairly high 30mm rise, which seems a little odd given its all-mountain intentions. Still, at 200g this carbon bar is competitive on the scales. There are handy cut marks at either end should you wish to chop it down a little from its full 780mm width, and the detailed central graphic makes it a doddle to get your bar aligned right. On the trail, the nine-degree backsweep feels comfortable enough and the width gives more than enough leverage when it comes to throwing your bike around. The Iodine 11 is relatively stiff but won't rattle your wrists in the rough. **ROB**





▲ FOR £150 MORE TRY:  
Fox 36 Float RC2 Factory  
£899 [www.mojo.co.uk](http://www.mojo.co.uk)

▼ FOR £369 LESS TRY:  
SR Suntour Auron RC2  
£379.99 [www.todayscyclist.co.uk](http://www.todayscyclist.co.uk)

# Fox 34 Float FIT4 fork

**£749** Mojo Suspension [www.mojo.co.uk](http://www.mojo.co.uk)

**WITH A NEW** chassis, air spring and damper for 2016, this is a fresh start for the Fox 34. At 1,760g, the top-spec Factory series fork is now 100g lighter and £31 cheaper than its biggest rival, the RockShox Pike RCT3. There are loads of travel options – 120/130/140mm for the 29er version, 140/150/160mm (UK only) for the 650b fork – and as well as the standard Float air spring tested here there's a TALAS option with 30mm of travel adjustment.

The new FIT4 cartridge borrows the larger diameter rebound shaft from Fox's hard-hitting RC2 unit. This increases oil flow, resulting in cooler running and more controlled damping. The external low-speed compression adjustments are new too, with your pick of 'open', 'medium' and locked-out 'firm' settings. With 22 clicks of adjustment in 'open' we never needed to use the other modes to control pedal bob. Rebound is adjusted on the lower leg, and the dials – and fork in general – all have a quality feel. The 15mm axle is easy to use too.

The combination of Kashima upper leg coating and SKF seals means the 34 gets moving with barely any effort, translating into excellent grip on the trail. Instead of being deflected, it subtly eases itself through chop, transmitting just enough info to let you know what's going on without being jarring. Despite the skinnier chassis, there's no noticeable reduction in tracking stiffness compared to the Pike, and the new damper and spring provide impressive support. The stroke is very progressive. We ended up removing the lone volume spacer in our 160mm model and running a high level of sag, but the fork still gave excellent support and resistance to bottoming out. When pushing really hard through rough ground or on big drops we noticed an occasional hint of harshness, though whether that was from the damping or slight chassis flex and binding we couldn't tell. If you're looking at tackling seriously technical terrain, the burlier Fox 36 is a better choice anyway. When it comes to hard-hitting trail forks though, the 34 is an excellent all-round option if low weight is a priority. **JON**

## MBUK

The 34 is improved in every way. Supple traction, increased support and lower weight are matched with better value



# MBUK

# WRECKED & RATED

Brand New Kit

## PRODUCT NEWS



### Air cooled

Full-face helmets are compulsory at many enduro races. Although they offer superior protection over a regular trail lid, they can get ridiculously hot. This is something iXS claim to have addressed with their new Xult full-face, which sports a VORTEX aeration system consisting of a multitude of vents and channels. The Xult will set you back £249.99, comes in six colours, weighs a claimed 1,100g and meets both European and American safety standards. More info can be found at [www.hotlines-uk.com](http://www.hotlines-uk.com).



### Carbon copy?

It wasn't long ago that UK company RockGuardZ released their Evo2 carbon mudguard, which we're big fans of here at MBUK. Though it's very effective, it's not the cheapest out there, which is why they've now launched the Evo2 Stealth. This new, cheaper, glass reinforced plastic guard gets all the same features and shaping as the pricier version and fits just about every fork out there but costs £14 less at £25.50. Head over to [www.rockguardz.com](http://www.rockguardz.com) for the full lowdown.

### Lube for your shaft

UK suspension wizards TF Tuned have teamed up with tyre sealant, lubricant and grease specialists Wickens & Soderstrom to produce a new lube. The No. 4 Tuned Suspension Lubricant is designed to reduce friction and prolong the life of seals and stanchion coatings, among a multitude of other benefits. Just drip it on to your seals or shock shaft, cycle the suspension and away you go. There's more info to be had at [www.wickenssoderstrom.com](http://www.wickenssoderstrom.com).



## Ragley Wiser Carbon handlebar

£100 Hotlines [www.hotlines-uk.com](http://www.hotlines-uk.com)

**RAGLEY'S ALLOY WISER** bar won the value award in our last handlebar group test (see issue 311) and the carbon fibre version is an equally good buy for those with deeper pockets.

The 760mm width and classic nine-degree backsweep shape are the same whether you go for metal or fibre. Spending the extra £60 on carbon saves you 85g though, making the Wiser Carbon competitive with other, pricier composite bars.

While the alloy bar is already comfortable without being

noodly, the glass fibre reinforced carbon bar has a distinctively damped feel that kills excess sting and spring to put even more trail information into the palms of your gloves.

The almost flat 10mm rise version is a great choice for 29ers or any other bike where you want to keep your hands and body position as low as possible too. There's no 35mm rise version like the alloy bar though, just a 25mm option. **GUY**

MBUK ★★★★



## Goodridge G-Star brake pads

£19.99 Hotlines  
[www.hotlines-uk.com](http://www.hotlines-uk.com)

**THE G-STAR MONIKER** refers to the special sintered compound of these Goodridge pads – a dense mix of fine particles that's different to the rough sintered compounds used by other manufacturers. We tested the SRAM Guide/XO Trail pads but they're available for most other popular brakes too. Breaking the pads in took next to no time at all. There's been no increase in noise over the original pads and there's still the same amount of stopping power on tap, with plenty of bite and a really positive feel. We've had no issues with heat build-up either. We like that a pad spring is included too. **JAKE**

MBUK ★★★★

## Oakley RadarLock Path Photochromic glasses

£225 Oakley UK [www.oakley.com](http://www.oakley.com)

**THOUGH THE PRICE** will get your eyes watering, the RadarLocks are some of the comfiest riding glasses we've ever tried – the fit and lens clarity are really quite outstanding. Oakley's vented photochromic lens does a good job of keeping that annoying fog at bay, though it will succumb if you stop on a really humid day. Most importantly, it adapts to changing light conditions rapidly and subtly, even when belting in and out of the trees at speed. Should you wish to try a different lens, the RadarLock lens swap system is quick and easy to use. **ROB**

MBUK ★★★★



# Leatt AirFlex Lite gloves

**£55** Hotlines [www.hotlines-uk.com](http://www.hotlines-uk.com)

**PLUCK A HAIR** from your head and take a look at it. According to Leatt, the fibres they weave the palms of their new AirFlex Lite gloves from are an incredible 7,500 times thinner than that hair. As you'd expect then, these come just about as close to that glove-free feel as you'll get. The grip on offer is superb, even when sodden, and there are no fussy gel grip strips to spoil things. The

stretch-fit body is equally thin and sits comfortably in place.

The chunky cuffs and even chunkier Armourgel rubber padding feel slightly at odds with the minimalist palm and neat fitting construction. Those looking for added protection may welcome their inclusion but they'll have to pay for it over a 'regular' glove. **RIC**

**MBUK** ★★★★☆



# Bontrager TLR Flash Charger track pump

**£99.99** Bontrager [www.bontrager.com](http://www.bontrager.com)

**BONTRAGER'S FLASH CHARGER** is a unique pump and compressor aimed at tubeless tyre users but its combined design is its weakness as well as its strength.

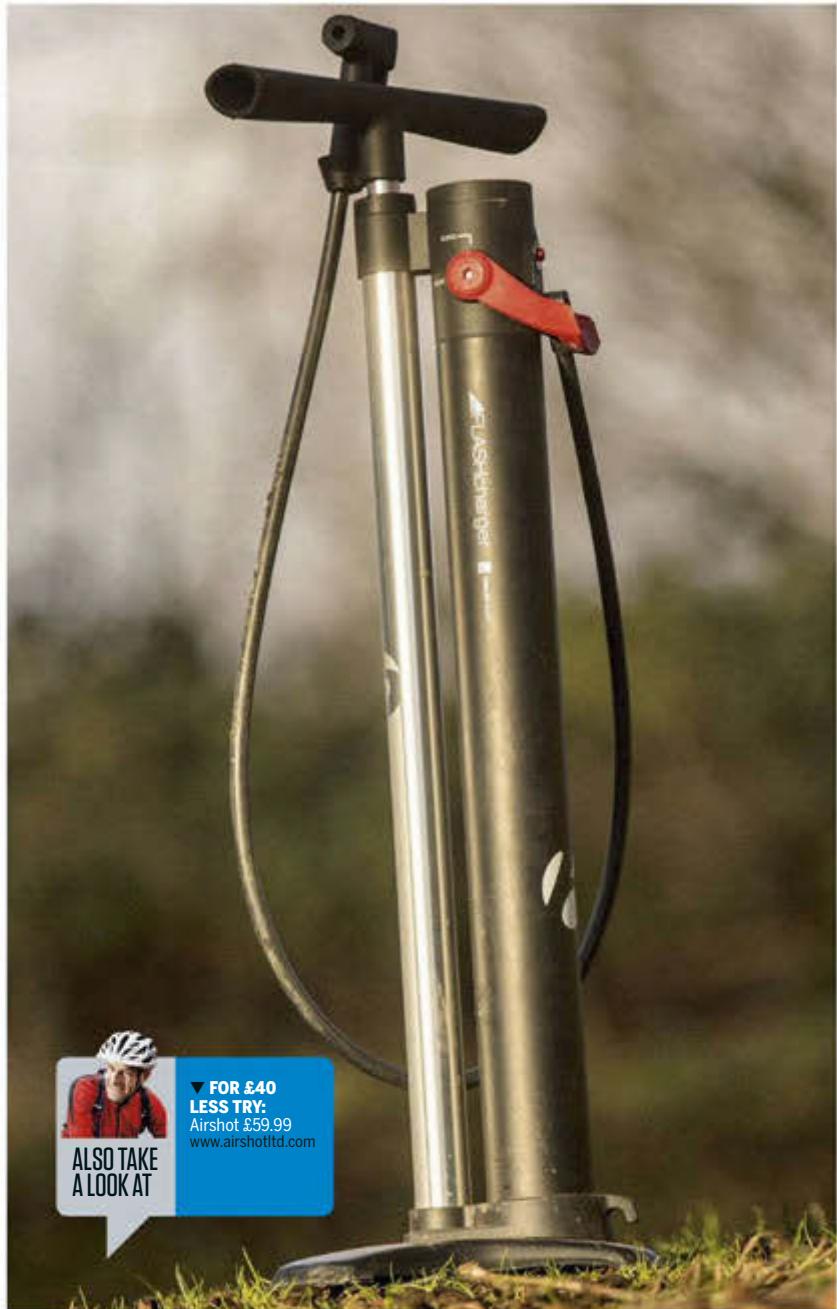
On the plus side, the big tank contains enough air to pop every tubeless or tubeless-ready tyre and rim combo we've tried into place as soon as we've thrown the big red pressure-dump switch. Even if it hasn't inflated it fully in one hit, a quick burst of pumping has sealed the deal. While it's the same price as a budget electric compressor, you can use it at trailheads, in race pits or anywhere else, and though it's heavy and bulky compared to a conventional pump, the one-piece construction makes it relatively simple to transport.

The low-volume stroke means it takes ages to get the tank up to pressure though. Because there's no way of separating the pump and tank, if you accidentally discharge the tank by leaving the dump valve open when you release the valve head, you have to recharge the whole system again – even if you just want to top up an already inflated tyre. The plastic hose, head and attachments are disappointing for £100 too, and more vulnerable to accidental damage than metal fixtures. While spares are available, the combo design means that if there's a problem with the pump the compressor tank is useless, and vice versa. **GUY**

**MBUK**

A smart idea for tubeless tyre users, but we expect better durability and build quality for £100

★★★☆



# MBUK

# WRECKED & RATED

## Brand New Kit

### PRODUCT NEWS

Continued

#### » Sommet interesting

Vitus's R&D manager Dale McMullan was spotted riding a new carbon Sommet prototype at the second round of the Enduro World Series in Ireland. Though there's no info on the bike just yet, its silhouette doesn't look too dissimilar to the current Sommet, though cables appear to be internally routed. The prototype had a carbon front triangle but an alloy rear triangle. Keep an eye glued to [www.vitusbikes.com](http://www.vitusbikes.com) for all the latest.



#### A standout lid

Tempted by a Troy Lee Designs A1 helmet but afraid you won't stand out enough? Fear not! TLD have just released three new limited edition A1s – an eye-popping turquoise Drone, along with Desert and Midnight Camo versions should you have a penchant for all things military. From what UK distributors Fisher Outdoor Leisure tell us there won't be many of these A1s coming in so you'll need to act fast to get one. The entire range and pricing info can be found at [www.fisheroutdoor.co.uk](http://www.fisheroutdoor.co.uk).

#### Tiny package

Deity have announced two new stems – the Micro DM and Cavity 35. At just 30mm long, the Micro DM is designed to work with the longer, slacker and lower DH bikes we're seeing more and more of these days. It's a four-piece direct-mount design with a 65mm wide bar clamp and weighs a claimed 110g. The Cavity 35 is, you guessed it, 35mm long and weighs a claimed 150g. Head to [www.hotlines-uk.com](http://www.hotlines-uk.com) to take your pick of the colour options.



## FLR F-75 shoes

£99.99 **Bob Elliot** [www.bob-elliot.co.uk](http://www.bob-elliot.co.uk)

**WITH A SEMI-CARBON** sole and dial fastener, these shoes look tempting for the price, but their performance on the trail isn't entirely positive.

The mainly nylon sole gets a small section of carbon fibre under the cleat area to give a solidly powerful feel underfoot without being too harsh on long days or rocky trails. As long as your feet are relatively long and narrow, the microfibre upper, Velcro strap and dial system give

reasonable support while pedalling. There's not much mesh for water to get in through so they shrug off puddle splashes pretty well. The single-click dial release is useful if you're taking them off with frozen or filthy hands too. The tread lugs are made from a hard, slippery rubber compound though, so you'll need to fit toe studs for grip in wet conditions.

Unfortunately the dial system's locking mechanism

isn't strong enough to stop it loosening click by click if you're walking up steep slopes on your toes. While re-tightening after any rambling isn't a big deal for trail use, it's a pain for racers tempted by the otherwise cost-effective performance. **GUY**

**MBUK**  
Stiff and efficient narrow-fit shoes, but the way the dial loosens when walking is irritating



## Topeak JoeBlow Fat track pump

£39.99 **Extra** [www.extrauk.co.uk](http://www.extrauk.co.uk)

**RIDING A FATBIKE** will keep you fit – especially the all-body workout that comes from inflating the monster tyres! The JoeBlow Fat floor pump cuts out some of the puff with an oversize barrel designed specifically for inflating high-volume tyres. It got our 4in tyres (mounted on 80mm rims) to 10psi in an impressive 25 strokes, compared to 55 with Topeak's all-rounder JoeBlow Sport pump.

The build quality is reassuringly robust, so it'll

survive getting rattled around in the boot of the car just fine. The simple to use TwinHead is compatible with Schrader, Presta and Dunlop valves, and the connection is solid and leak free. Maxing out at 30psi, the gauge has well-spaced markings and gives readings within 0.5psi of those from our digital gauge. The price tag is very reasonable considering the reduced effort required to get your fatbike tyres inflated. **MATT**

**MBUK** ★★★★☆



BRAND NEW KIT



ALSO TAKE  
A LOOK AT

▲ FOR £10 MORE TRY:  
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▼ FOR £5 LESS TRY:  
Troy Lee Designs KG 5400  
£54.99 [www.fisheroutdoor.co.uk](http://www.fisheroutdoor.co.uk)



## Specialized Atlas knee pads

£60 Specialized [www.specialized.com](http://www.specialized.com)

### SPECIALIZED'S NEW KNEE

pads are designed to keep movement free and easy but still ward off scrapes and knocks should you take a spill. The 'anti-shock' foam covering the knee is relatively thin and very flexible, and there's additional padding on either side of the knee cup – a nice touch, which doesn't hinder movement when you're on the pedals.

Specialized have opted for a strapless design that relies on an extended (it goes at least half way up the thigh), highly

breathable mesh sleeve with twin elasticated cuffs to hold the pads in place. The upper cuff is lined with silicone print to help prevent slippage. With no sizing adjustment it's worth trying before buying – you'll want as tight as fit as possible. We found that the upper cuff had a tendency to slip down once things began to heat up, but the lower cuff had a tight enough fit to prevent the pads themselves budging.

Pedalling in the Atlas pads is extremely comfortable, and the

decent sized cutout at the rear of the knee means they don't get too sweaty either. For general trail riding the Atlas pads are great. Once on, it's easy to forget you're even wearing them. Start riding slightly wilder trails though and you'll want something a bit burlier. ROB

**MBUK**  
Really comfy, even during long, mile-munching rides. But try before you buy, due to lack of adjustment

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# MBUK WRECKED & RATED

Brand New Kit

## THE SMALL STUFF MTB BITS AND PIECES



### EVOC PADDED BIKE RUG

£49.95 Silverfish  
[www.silverfish-uk.com](http://www.silverfish-uk.com)

Plenty of well positioned Velcro straps mean that once EVOC's Bike Rug is strapped in place over your bike it won't shift, helping to keep it nicely protected in transit. It's quick and easy to use too, though certainly not cheap. ROB

MBUK ★★★★☆



### LEZYNE FLOW SL BOTTLE CAGE

£7.99 Upgrade Bikes  
[www.upgradebikes.co.uk](http://www.upgradebikes.co.uk)

Designed for compact frames where it's difficult to use a regular top-loading cage, the Flow SL has a simple and secure side-loading design and is available in left and right side options. JIMMER

MBUK ★★★★☆



### TSG RIOT SOCKS

£29.99 Ison Distribution  
[www.ison-distribution.com](http://www.ison-distribution.com)

These socks have PU foam sewn in on the shin and sides of the ankle to give a bit more protection. They're sized so the foam sits correctly and do a great job of lessening the pain from those pedal/shin impacts. JAKE

MBUK ★★★★☆



## Bell Full Flex piisspot helmet

£79.99 Zyro [www.zyro.co.uk](http://www.zyro.co.uk)

**THE FULL FLEX** may seem expensive for a piisspot lid but there's plenty of technology and attention to detail to back up the price tag.

For starters, it's designed to remain safe after multiple impacts. Detailing is on point too, with a goggle loop at the rear and mesh covering the main and ear vents. The build quality really does make other skate style lids look inferior.

Our medium helmet was supposed to fit 55-59cm

heads but riders towards the top of that bracket found it a bit of a squeeze. Get the fit right though and the Full Flex is really comfortable – so much so that we didn't feel the need to take it off during long, sunny evening sessions at the jumps. Hearing isn't affected by the mesh over the ears, and the vents do a good job of keeping your bonce cool considering their small size. JAKE

MBUK ★★★★☆



## Dakine Hot Laps 1.5l bumbag

£25 Dakine Europe  
[eu.dakine.com](http://eu.dakine.com)

**DAKINE'S HOT LAPS** bumbag is riding the enduro high at the minute, along with other bags of this kind. Pack the bare minimum inside its neat, fleece-lined pockets (a small pump, phone, multi-tool and tube) and it's a comfy enough bit of kit to wear. If you can't stash a bottle on your bike, the Hot Laps has a secure holster complete with elasticated drawcord. When the bag is loaded and there's a bottle in place too, the waist strap starts to dig into your stomach. The pack moves about quite a bit when you're out of the saddle too. ROB

MBUK ★★★★☆



## Joystick Builder stem

£80 Hookit Products [www.hookitproducts.co.uk](http://www.hookitproducts.co.uk)

**CANADA'S JOYSTICK HAVE** an expanding range of MTB products, including this nicely thought through stem. CNC machined and available for both 31.8mm and 35mm bars, it employs a novel clamping system. The faceplate has to be clipped on to the bar, then bolted on to the stem via the top two bolts. This allows for easy set-up and centring of the bar before the bottom two bolts are added. Another advantage to this system over a regular four-bolt faceplate is that it

removes the possibility of the bolts being tightened differently, leading to uneven stress on the bar – something that's particularly important to avoid with carbon bars.

On the trail, our 50mm sample revealed no significant flex and didn't suffer any creaking despite some hard riding with a stiff and wide bar attached. The 149g weight is very reasonable, but the price is a little heftier. SEB

MBUK ★★★★☆

BRAND NEW KIT



## fi'zi:k Thar Manganese saddle

£84.99 Extra UK [www.extrauk.co.uk](http://www.extrauk.co.uk)

**WITH EXTRA-LONG** rails, the 246g Thar is designed to compensate for the slacker seat angles often found on 29ers and allow a forward saddle position. This doesn't make it 29er specific though – it can be used to simulate a steep seat angle on any bike.

The extra-wide, down-curved nose makes it an effective and

comfy perch when tackling steep climbs, while the short tail and narrow hull keep it out of the way when descending. With no central channel, we didn't find fi'zi:k's trademark barrel-shaped shell the comfiest on longer rides, even with a quality chamois. **SEB**

**MBUK** ★★★★☆

## Dianese Hybrid knee pads

£69.95 Windwave [www.windwave.co.uk](http://www.windwave.co.uk)

**THE HYBRIDS COMBINE** a softer internal pad for maximum comfort with a harder outer shell for ultimate protection. The result is a comfy pad with a harder coating over the kneecap and top of the shin – the areas most likely to get pummelled into the floor. The harder outer shell is also meant to allow the pad to slide along the ground in the event of a crash (a soft outer would be more likely to snag, potentially causing the pad to slide down your leg).

The Hybrids are secured with small Velcro tabs at the top and bottom and a diagonal strap behind the knee. After a bit of experimentation we found it was best to apply minimal tension to this strap. Otherwise, the pads had a tendency to bunch up above the knee, leading to a little discomfort. Once we'd sorted the strap tension the pads were comfortable on longer rides, though we still suffered bunching when pushing uphill to ride back down.

We can vouch for the protectiveness of the pads, which don't move around when you hit the ground. The honeycomb-pattern padding helps with venting too, though the skintight fit means they still warm up relatively fast. **JAKE**

**MBUK**  
It took us a while to get the fit right, but the Hybrids are relatively light and offer decent protection, even for DH  
★★★★★



**DVO**  
DEVELOPED SUSPENSION

## DIAMOND ENDURO RACE FORK



27.5" OR 29"  
140-160MM  
GREEN OR BLACK  
SRP £799

# MBUK WRECKED & RATED

Six of the Best

## TRACK PUMPS

£34.99 Blackburn Airtower 2

Zyro [www.zyro.co.uk](http://www.zyro.co.uk)



**SO GOOD...**

Blackburn's self-adjusting head works with both Schrader and Presta valves and we had no sealing issues with either type. Fifty strokes yielded an average pressure of 39psi. The fairly small volume of the cylinder means high pressures can be achieved comfortably.

**NO GOOD...** Sat at the bottom of the pump, the gauge is

hard to read and relatively inaccurate – ours over-read by about 10 per cent. There was quite a lot of play in the handle too and the pump feels generally less well put together than others here.

MBUK ★★★★☆

£46.99 Topeak Joe Blow Sprint

Extra [www.extrauk.co.uk](http://www.extrauk.co.uk)



**SO GOOD...**

Although pricey, the Topeak is the most solid and sturdy feeling pump here, with next to no play and a smooth action. The dual head performs well. The bleed valve lets you drop pressure incrementally without disconnecting the valve head – useful when adjusting pressures, such as after over-inflating to seat a stubborn tubeless tyre.

**NO GOOD...** The gauge is marked in 5psi increments, making accurate pressure setting impossible. The cylinder volume is the smallest here (by a small margin), yielding 35psi after 50 strokes.

MBUK ★★★★☆

£24.99 GT Traffic

GT Bicycles [www.gtbicycles.com](http://www.gtbicycles.com)



**SO GOOD...**

Despite being the cheapest pump here, GT's offering has two things going for it – a decent cylinder volume and a surprisingly accurate gauge. It delivered a fairly respectable 38psi in our 50-stroke test. Most impressively, the dial consistently matched our digital pressure gauge to within a couple of psi.

**NO GOOD...** That

superb gauge is a little small, and hidden away at the bottom of the pump. The plastic construction makes the Traffic feel a little flimsy. The valve head was occasionally fiddly to connect to Schrader valves.

MBUK ★★★★☆

£29.99 Syncros FP 3.0

Syncros [www.syncros.com](http://www.syncros.com)



**SO GOOD...** Able to inflate our test tyre to 48psi in 50 strokes, this pump boasts one of the largest volume cylinders on test. The one-footed footplate design means you can place your other foot behind – a position we found comfortable, especially when combined with the wide, curved handle. The gauge was accurate to within a couple of

psi, the pump feels pretty sturdy and the head sealed around both valve types without any issues.

**NO GOOD...** The narrow footplate makes the FP 3.0 a bit wobbly when pumping fast.

MBUK ★★★★☆

£29.99 Airwave Tornado

Hotlines [www.hotlines-uk.com](http://www.hotlines-uk.com)



**SO GOOD...**

The Tornado is a sturdy feeling pump for the price and has good ergonomics too. It reached a respectable 40psi in our 50-stroke test and the broad footplate makes it nice and stable when pumping quickly, such as during installation of tubeless tyres. The top-mounted gauge is clear and easy to read, while a bleed valve allows pressures to be quickly fine-tuned.

**NO GOOD...** Our sample's gauge read 3 to 4psi below the values given by our digital pressure gauge. The valve adaptor works well but is a little fiddly.

MBUK ★★★★☆



£34.99 Truflo Maxtrax 3

Madison [www.madison.co.uk](http://www.madison.co.uk)



**SO GOOD...**

The Maxtrax 3's dual head toggles between both valve types without issue and we couldn't detect any leaking. The whole pump feels solid, with minimal play and wobble. The top-mounted gauge is its trump card – it's both easy to read and accurate, consistently matching our digital pressure meter to within 1psi. We'd be happy

to rely on it to ensure pretty accurate tyre pressures at the trailhead.

**NO GOOD...** Fifty strokes delivered 42psi, which, although respectable enough, is still only just above average.





**Stem: Tightened ✓**  
**Brakes: Adjusted ✓**  
**Gears: Fine-tuned ✓**  
**Lung capacity: Whatever it takes ✓**

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**PrepStation Pro**  
Complete Mobile Repair Series





With a fresh fork and his seatpost problems sorted, Ric's ready to take on all comers on Strava!

## RIC'S VITUS SOMMET VRX

£2,699.99 **Vitus Bikes** [www.vitusbikes.com](http://www.vitusbikes.com)



**As I reported** last month, the Vitus and I have now completed our first race together, and after gleaning some positives from a

disappointing result, I'm itching to get her out between the tapes again. The problem is finding the time. I love racing but between training, preparing, travelling, practising and competing it's pretty much a time vacuum. So I've revisited an old friend – Strava.

I'm lucky enough to live near a couple of really good trail centres so finding segments isn't a problem, and unusually for a swathe of rural Scotland, there's enough mobile coverage to be able to upload my rides. Having not used the pocket pace checker for months, I

turned it on and span the Vitus up and around Mabie Forest for a lap. The results surprised me – I was higher up the rankings than I'd estimated. I went to bed that night knowing that my chilled-out ride had gifted my virtual rivals the seconds they now held over me.

The following day I returned, game face engaged – and promptly made loads of mistakes everywhere. I left angry at myself for having ruined a ride chasing the pointless self-adulation only a ropey GPS signal can provide. In other words, feeling pretty much as I normally do after a race!

The only mechanical fly in the Vitus ointment this month has been a swap of the Marzocchi 350 NCR fork, due to what felt like overly tight seals wearing away some of the Espresso coating on the legs.

A pre bedded-in fork from the Vitus demo squadron arrived promptly, and it feels a lot more supple, allowing me to add a bit more air pressure to bolster front end support. It's really improved the feel and composure of the bike.

Also, I've solved the mystery of why the RockShox Reverb Stealth post wasn't returning when fully dropped into the frame. The cable was kinking in the seat tube, so I just needed to adjust the down tube cable tidies to get her running sweet.

### SPEC DECK

**RENTHAL FATBAR CARBON (30MM RISE)** £134.99  
[www.ison-distribution.com](http://www.ison-distribution.com)

**RENTHAL APEX STEM (50MM REACH)** £79.99  
[www.ison-distribution.com](http://www.ison-distribution.com)

**RENTHAL PUSH-ON KEVLAR GRIPS** £11.99  
[www.ison-distribution.com](http://www.ison-distribution.com)

# MBUK Machines

We ride these long-term test bikes hard for a year, constantly scrutinising new kit, to bring you nothing but the truth about their performance



## JIMMER'S MARIN MOUNT VISION C-XM8

£3,500 Paligap [www.paligap.cc](http://www.paligap.cc)



**Right now it** feels like the Mount Vision, AKA R2, is in a good place, with the tweaks I've made to the suspension really paying off. One issue has surfaced though. When I removed the stock Fox 32 fork to replace it with the 34 from last year's long-terminer I noticed that the internally routed cables, which enter the frame at the head tube, had rubbed shallow grooves in the fork's steerer tube. This is something I'll

definitely have to keep tabs on over the coming months.

A recent MBUK jaunt to Tidworth Freeride in Wiltshire for a photoshoot proved to be a fun filled, dusty affair – just what summer riding is all about. It was great to push R2 harder than he's ever been pushed before on drops, jumps and through some of the bike park's pretty gnarly root sections too. Where the Mount Vision excelled (and was the most fun) was on the jump lines though. The compact sizing definitely helps when it

comes to throwing R2 around in the air, which soon helped to lift my confidence.

I've also gone all 'enduro' and fitted a bottle cage. I originally opted for a Lezyne Flow Cage – I'd spotted one on issue 314 cover star Josh Lewis's bike and loved the way it looked – but quickly realised that the Marin's low top tube and compact frame made it tricky to remove the bottle when pedalling, so I swapped to a side-loading Lezyne Flow Cage SL, which works a treat.

## JONNY'S NS SODA SLOPE

£1,849.99 Hotlines [www.hotlines-uk.com](http://www.hotlines-uk.com)



**I've spent the** past month getting used to how the Soda rides on pump tracks and doing a bit of street riding – something that this 100mm (3.9in) travel slopestyle bike actually takes to pretty well. The rear suspension does a great job of absorbing heavy landings and cases. The chainstays are slightly longer than on a regular jump hardtail, but for a taller rider like me that's actually a positive. I've stripped the bike down to its frame to weigh it (3.18kg, if you were wondering) but haven't needed to do any maintenance.



Jonny's purple push iron is a lot more forgiving than a regular jump bike

## TEAM BIKES



JCW's already bonded with the Intense. Now he just needs to hit some more hardcore terrain. And clean the flies off his teeth

### JCW'S INTENSE CARBINE 29 EXPERT

£5,299 Extra UK [www.extrauk.co.uk](http://www.extrauk.co.uk)



I've lusted after an Intense since the days when the M1 ruled supreme on the DH circuit, so when the chance arose to get one on test I didn't take much convincing. The deal was sealed by the fact the Carbine 29 is available in a proper XL size, with a 648mm effective top tube and masses of standover room. It looks great too. With its low-slung frame and perfect proportions, it's easy to mistake it for a 650b bike.

On paper the Intense is a bit of an odd one. While rear travel is adjustable between 140 (5.5in) and 125mm (4.9in), there's a 160mm (6.3in) fork up front. In theory that could make it hard to achieve a balanced feel. It's also got lengthy chainstays – at 451mm they're 21mm longer than those on the Specialized Enduro 29. A good thing for stability at speed, but not so great on tighter trails, or so conventional wisdom dictates.

Forget the theory. Any concerns I had were brushed aside within the first couple of crank strokes. My first hint of this carbon trail weapon's speed was when I found myself overtaking commuters on the ride home from the workshop. A trip to Cannock Chase confirmed that it's no slouch in the dirt either – it lapped up hairpin-riddled climbs, floated through braking-bump infested berms and remained beautifully composed on small jumps and drops. I can't wait to put it to the test on some proper mountains.



#### OLLY'S GIANT REIGN 1

£3,999 **Giant Bicycles** [www.giant-bicycles.com](http://www.giant-bicycles.com)

**My love affair** with the flying fruit salad is still in full swing thanks to some epic days in the saddle. I've ridden all manner of trails, from sizeable hucks and gaps at the Black Mountains Cycle Centre and Tidworth Freeride to off-piste adventures down some of the steepest terrain the Welsh valleys have to offer, with some Bristol based XC rides thrown in for good measure. This bike is so capable that I'm struggling to ride anything else right now.



#### JAKE'S MERIDA ONE-SIXTY 7.900

£3,250 **Merida** [www.merida-bikes.com](http://www.merida-bikes.com)

**After making some** pretty drastic changes to the Merida I've decided to go back to the stock shock length and explore what I can do to improve the suspension action without compromising the geometry, which is really quite tidy. This also means I can run the full 160mm of travel and not have the rear wheel rub on the frame at bottom-out – which is what was happening with the shorter shock bolted in. More next time!



#### ROB'S CANYON STRIVE CF 9.0 RACE

£3,746.98 **Canyon** [www.canyon.com](http://www.canyon.com)

**With the trails** getting rougher by the minute, I decided that the Strive's RockShox Monarch Plus DebonAir shock needed tweaking. Canyon don't add any Bottomless Ring volume spacers, so there's plenty of scope to add more progression. The ShapeShifter link meant it took a little longer than normal to get the shock off the bike but adding the rings took just two minutes. I've added two for now and like how the back end feels.

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## GUY'S GT FORCE X CARBON EXPERT

£3,499.99 **GT Bicycles** [www.gtbicycles.com](http://www.gtbicycles.com)



**It's second chance** season on the GT this month as two previous test fails get another chance to prove their mettle and a new fork gets sent back to base to see if they can iron out an issue that's arisen during testing.

The fork in question is the 34mm-legged Rogue from RST. It's a solid feeling unit at over 2kg and is reasonably smooth and controlled if you're just cruising, but my sample started spiking and choking as soon as speed and impact size increased. I ran it for six weeks everywhere from local woods to enduro events just in case it was a bedding-in issue with the bushes that the legs slide on, but it hasn't got any

better so it's heading back to its German homeland for autopsy.

Coincidentally its replacement has come from Germany too – a Mattoc Pro straight from Manitou's Euro HQ. After great first year results, both our 2015 Mattoc samples developed travel loss problems as air leaked into the negative air spring chamber via construction scars on the stanchions. This new set comes from a later batch produced with fresh tooling so hopefully it'll boast the same excellent smoothness and damping as our early samples but continue to deliver its full 160mm (6.3in) of travel over time.

Eagle-eyed Force fans – or those who thought the matching anodising was a bit

chavy – will notice that the GT has new wheels. The green Superstar Teslas I was running were top performers but I needed to put some more miles in on DMR's new Zones after the set sent in for our wheels group test last month folded a rim wall with minimal provocation – something that shocked me, given DMR's heritage of hardcore jump use. Upgrade Bikes rushed me a new rear wheel to see if that lasted better. So far so good, despite lots of boulder battering at Stainburn and in the 'Ard Rock Time Trial.

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Words Rob Weaver Pics Steve Behr



# BIG VALUE DOWNHILL BIKES



## THE TESTER

**Rob Weaver**  
Our Tech Ed in Chief has ridden and raced his fair share of downhill bikes over the years, and he knows just what's needed to tackle the ever increasing demands of modern DH tracks.

Ten years ago you'd have been hard pushed to get hold of a competitive downhill bike for less than £3,000. Sure, with some tweaks here and there, a couple of component swaps and a fresh set of rubber, a bike at that price would have been OK to race. But it still would have been a million miles from the machines the pros were riding. That's all changed. Dropping just over

£2,000 now gets you sorted suspension, decent tyres and geometry that'll let you tackle the gnarliest, most hardcore downhill trails.

Pick the right bike, and instead of having to fork out for any upgrades you can simply throw a leg over and get galloping down the hill. We rounded up four of the best in this category to see which bike truly shines brightest and, most importantly, will let you ride fastest.

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# VITUS DOMINER

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*Can the Dominer dominate?*

## SO GOOD

Smooth, well-controlled fork

Shimano's Zee transmission is dependable and robust

Centred/neutral riding position

## NO GOOD

Can feel tall in the turns

Zee brakes take a lot of bedding in

## JARGON BUSTER

**Bedding in**  
Process of breaking in new disc brake pads, normally consisting of a series of firm stops to deposit pad material on the rotors.

**Reach**  
Horizontal distance from the centre of the head tube to the centre of the bottom bracket.

**V**itus have been making serious waves with their current crop of hardtails and full-suspension trail bikes, which offer impressive performance at decent prices, so we were keen to find out if the same would be true of the latest, 650b wheeled version of their downhill bike, the Dominer.

## The frame

Of the four bikes in this test, the Dominer's silhouette is the most traditional. At the rear, Vitus's uncomplicated Four-Bar V-Link suspension platform pumps out 200mm (7.9in) of travel, controlled via a RockShox Kage RC shock.

The heavily hydroformed down tube stretches up and joins the top tube with a reassuringly long weld before they both meet at the head tube. This ensures there's plenty of strength where it's needed and leaves you with the peace of mind that the Dominer should be able to take more than its fair share of heavy landings.

Vitus haven't been conservative with the numbers either. The Dominer's geometry is bang up to date with a

nicely kicked-out 63.2-degree head angle, a decent amount of reach (424mm on the medium frame), the longest wheelbase here (1,224mm) and a fairly average bottom bracket height (345mm). It even gets the must-have 650b wheel treatment.

## The kit

There's little we can fault when it comes to the component choices on the Dominer. The fork can often be a sticking point at this sort of price, but all of our testers were impressed with the smooth, well-controlled feel of the Marzocchi 380 CR up front. Slapping Super Tacky compound Maxxis High Roller II tyres on to WTB's broad i25 (25mm internal width) rims is another nice touch, resulting in a great tyre profile that gives plenty of dependable, predictable grip regardless of the terrain.

Shimano's Zee transmission is a solid, reliable choice and didn't once skip a beat throughout testing. The one niggle is the Zee brakes, which took longer than any other stoppers on test to bed in, and when they did, the power on offer was really quite

underwhelming. The Vitus own-brand finishing kit (bar, grips, saddle) is more than good enough for the job at hand.

## The ride

The fork was well sprung for our testers but we did need to switch to a lighter spring at the rear – a procedure that wasn't quite as straightforward on the Vitus as on the other bikes here because the Dominer's lower shock mount shares its hardware with the main pivot. Once you get the knack of removing the rear shock it doesn't take too long to do though.

We also had issues when it came to dialling in the rebound damping. While we were able to achieve our desired return speed, this left the adjuster just one click away from being fully backed off. Vitus are currently looking into a solution to this.

On the trail, things feel familiar and relatively well balanced almost straight away, which is great if this is your first venture into the world of big, burly downhill bikes. The Dominer doesn't feel quite as aggressive as the other bikes on test though, especially when you really start motoring. As you



## HAMMER INTO CHOPPY TERRAIN AND THAT NEUTRAL RIDING POSITION AND DECENT WHEELBASE REALLY PAY OFF

sling the Vitus from turn to turn it becomes obvious that it doesn't have the same low-slung centre of mass as the other bikes here – it feels taller and requires more effort to corner at similar speeds. This isn't a big problem, and with time you can adapt, but pace in the turns definitely doesn't come as easily on the Dominer as it does on some of its competitors.

Hammer into some choppy terrain and that neutral riding position and decent wheelbase really pay off. The

Marzocchi fork eats up the obstacles laid before it in a supple yet supportive manner, and the back end works away without fuss, providing just enough feedback through the bike so you know what's going on beneath the tyres, while carrying decent speed through the rough. The centred riding position makes it easy to shift your weight around, helping you to attack the trail as hard as you can.

The Vitus's relatively low weight means it can be manhandled, popped

and dropped without fuss too, but we'd suggest putting some serious time in on the Zee brakes to make sure they're bedded in sufficiently before going too crazy. If they just had a bit more oomph, the Dominer would feel even more confident at speed. »

**MBUK**

A little top heavy in the turns but stable and confidence inspiring when things get fast and furious



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**OFF TRACK**

The Boxer RC fork is OK until things get really rough, but then it doesn't take long to get out of its depth

**LOW RIDER**

With most of the frame's weight positioned nice and low, the Pulse feels really confident through the turns

# NUKEPROOF PULSE COMP

**£2,599.99**

*Is the budget Pulse still World Cup worthy?*

**SO GOOD**

Low centre of mass means it rails turns  
Solid build will take a hammering  
Rear end swallows bumps with ease

**NO GOOD**

Not particularly nimble due to high weight  
Fork isn't the best, considering price

**JARGON BUSTER**

**Spring rate**  
The amount of weight required to compress a fork or shock spring a specified distance. In most cases with coil springs, this is measured in lb/in.

**Compound**  
The rubber mix used to construct the tread of a tyre. Softer compounds provide more grip but tend to wear more quickly.

**T**he Pulse is the only bike here with World Cup winning credentials. It's also the priciest machine on test. So how does the budget version of this world-beating design compare?

**The frame**

Although many race fans expected the production Pulse to get 650b wheels for 2015, it didn't, and still sports the 26in size. It is the only bike here that comes in an XL option though.

There's no getting away from just how burly this beast is. The big box-section tubing, beefy single-pivot rear end, slammed three-stage Fallout Linkage and 210mm (8.3in) of rear wheel travel give a clear indication of the Pulse's intentions – outright annihilation of even the toughest tracks on the world circuit.

Ovalised dropout chips allow you to adjust the chainstay length by 10mm, so you can stick with the more flickable 435mm setting or stretch things out for maximum stability at 445mm. This is easy to do and great if you like to fettle with set-up. The head angle is a slack 63.6 degrees but the

Pulse has the highest BB on test, at 350mm, and the shortest wheelbase, even in the longest chainstay setting, at just over 1,205mm.

**The kit**

Although the Pulse is the most expensive bike here, its spec list – though pretty solid – isn't quite as dialled as some of its rivals'. This helps contribute to its 18.46kg (40.7lb) overall weight, making it the heaviest bike on test too. Up front sits a RockShox Boxer RC – by no means a bad fork, but overshadowed by the competition here. The Kage RC shock, on the other hand, dealt with everything we could throw at it in a composed fashion.

SRAM supply the DB5 brakes, which offer a decent amount of power, as well as the 10-speed X7 transmission, which doesn't get a Type 2 clutch mech. The VertStar compound Schwalbe Magic Mary tyres are a definite positive, especially in the mixed conditions we're accustomed to here in the UK – these suckers will find grip in just about anything. The Nukeproof finishing kit is quality stuff

too, though not everyone will dig the lofty 38mm rise on the handlebar.

**The ride**

It took a little experimentation to get things feeling just right at the rear. We initially opted to run a lighter spring and a little more sag, which left us with a super-supple 'point and plough' machine that was great in a straight line through the rough stuff but lacked the liveliness needed on jumps and smoother, mellower trails. Shifting up a spring rate (unfortunately the stock springs only come in 50lb increments, not 25lb as sold by some aftermarket companies) and running a little less sag gave us back some of the pop needed to chuck the bike around on tamer trails, yet the rear end retained much of its supple, planted feel, which was great when things got ugly – this is where this bike comes to life.

While the transmission and heavy crankset are a little disappointing for the money, they get on with the job just fine. The same can't be said for the Boxer RC fork up front though. On smaller hits it's smooth and supple enough to keep the front wheel



**CORNERING IS RIDICULOUSLY CONFIDENT AND IT DOESN'T TAKE LONG BEFORE YOU'RE CARVING THROUGH FAST, AWKWARD SECTIONS AT A FAIR OLD LICK**

planted and it tracks the terrain well enough to maintain traction through loose turns, but when the going gets rowdy, the fork gets out of its depth.

With minimal low-speed compression damping wound on it deals with the bigger hits in a reasonable manner but lacks support. Add more low-speed compression and there's a marked improvement in support but things can feel pretty harsh through your hands on fast stutter bumps and you have to work to keep the front wheel on track. Fitting a Charger damper – as used in the

Boxxers on the Canyon and YT – would solve this, but cost you an extra £290.

The Pulse's bulk and big, slow-rolling tyres mean it hasn't got the most 'get up and go' off the line, but as the gradient steepens this bike quickly finds its stride and you get an insight into its real potential. With most of the frame's weight slung down between your feet, cornering is ridiculously confident and it doesn't take long before you're carving through fast, awkward sections at a fair old lick. That weight does mean the Pulse prefers to be steered on to a line and then left to

deal with the consequences, rather than finessed through in a more calculated way. If you're happy to muscle this beast around, you'll be rewarded when you let it rip. The Nukeproof may not quite tally with the other bikes here on paper but its World Cup winning frame can go very fast in the right rider's hands – especially if you afford to upgrade the fork damper. »

#### MBUK

The Pulse has plenty of potential and likes to be ridden really hard. A damper upgrade in the fork would make the most of this bike



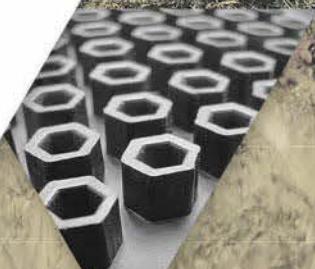
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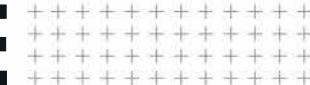
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There's plenty of front end grip thanks to the aggressively treaded Maxxis Shorty front tyre and sensitive RockShox Boxxer Team fork



# CANYON TORQUE DHX ROCKZONE



**£2,446.98** inc boxing and shipping

*Is the Canyon just about bling or can it perform too?*

**SO GOOD**

Boxxer Team fork is one smooth operator  
Cane Creek shock provides massive tuning potential  
Low overall weight means a playful feel

**NO GOOD**

Really short back end keeps things lively but makes for a less centred riding position

**JARGON BUSTER**

**Front centre**  
Horizontal distance from the centre of the front wheel axle to the centre of the bottom bracket.

**Wheelbase**  
Horizontal distance between the front and rear wheel axles.

**G**erman direct-buy brand Canyon are renowned for their 'bang for your buck' value. Is the impressive spec sheet of the Torque backed up by its on-track performance though?

### The frame

The Torque's compact, low-slung looks are deceptive. The Canyon may look like the dinkiest bike on test but the relaxed 62.7-degree head angle, decent 430mm reach (on the medium frame tested) and lengthy 800mm front centre add up to produce one of the longest bikes on test, with a wheelbase of 1,215mm. It still has the shortest chainstays here though, measuring a stubby 425mm.

A 'Trackflip' chip in the lower shock mount allows you to tweak the amount of rear wheel travel (195-210mm/7.7-8.3in) along with the head angle and bottom bracket height, should you want to tailor the bike to the track you're riding/racing. Controlling all of that travel is the impressively adjustable Cane Creek Double Barrel rear shock. This offers high- and low-speed compression

and rebound dials – plenty to think about then. Neat features include integrated fork bump stops and internal routing for a stealth dropper post, should you want to create more of a do-it-all machine rather than a pure downhill. The one thing the Torque does lack is the bigger 650b wheels seen on the Vitus and YT.

### The kit

As you'd expect from Canyon, the kit bolted to the Torque is some of the finest downhill hardware available, making it a ridiculously competitive package on paper and the lightest bike on test by some margin.

Among the many component highlights is the Boxxer Team fork. This gets RockShox's beautifully smooth Charger damper, which makes for a ground hugging, traction rich ride with masses of composure when taking on the big hits. Interestingly, Canyon have specced SRAM's X01 DH seven-speed transmission rather than the 10-speed Shimano Saint found on the top-end Torque DHX Flashzone. We had no issues with the more limited gear range but there's only one choice of

rear mech and replacements certainly aren't cheap at £210.

### The ride

The Torque has a lot of things going for it. Point it down just about any track or trail and you'll have a blast tackling whatever lies ahead. The low weight and stumpy chainstays make for a livelier ride than the rest of the bikes here, which many riders will really appreciate. Unlike some of the bigger hitters, the Canyon has a nimbleness that encourages a more playful, pump-and-pop based riding style.

That's not to say it won't handle things when the hillside steepens and the terrain deteriorates. With that raked-out head angle, long front centre and super-supple yet impressively composed Boxxer fork, there's no shortage of confidence as you go belting over the brow of a drop and into the unknown.

The combination of the sensitive fork and aggressively treaded Maxxis Shorty front tyre means traction is never a worry. You can rip into turns with your feet up and load the bike hard, knowing it'll stay glued to the »



THERE'S NO SHORTAGE OF CONFIDENCE AS YOU  
BELT OVER THE BROW OF A DROP AND INTO THE  
UNKNOWN, AND TRACTION IS NEVER A WORRY

ground. Through faster compressions and undulations, especially where line choice is critical, it doesn't take long to realise the Torque needs a little more finesse than some of the other bikes here to keep it on track though.

That short back end does mean you feel less centred on the bike and the Canyon requires more exaggerated weight shifts forward and backward in choppy terrain when compared to the likes of the Vitus. This doesn't take long to get used to though, and

doesn't detract from how much fun this bike is to ride.

Setting up the Double Barrel shock takes time and requires a special tool, but the Cane Creek website provides plenty of information to get you on the right track and adjustments on the hill are more about refining performance than anything else. Control is impressive throughout the travel and the supple initial stroke helps to keep the back wheel planted as you pummel through rough, rooty sections at

speed. The back end of the Canyon as a whole produces a nicely predictable ride with decent feedback and support.

Though some of the other bikes here outshine the Torque in specific scenarios, its more playful nature and all-round ability elevate its appeal. »

#### MBUK

The Canyon is a fun, playful downhill rig that's specced with some of the best kit available





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**2013 GIANT ANTHEM X2**

Alloy frame, RockShox Monarch rear shock, RockShox Reverb RL fork, 30 Speed Shimano Deore gearing and disc brakes. RRP £1500 now £1499.99  
Sram 20 speed gearing, Shimano disc brakes. RRP £1500 now £1499.99  
rrp £1500.00 NOW £1499.99



**2013 GIANT ANTHEM X2**

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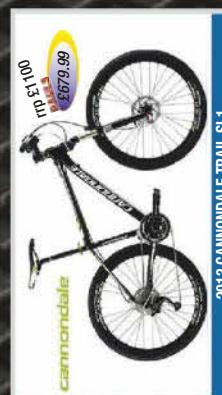
**2014 CUBE LTD RACE 29**

Alloy hardtail, RockShox Reverb RL, Pivloc fork, 30 spd Shimano SLX XT grg, XT Hubs and Deore Hydraulic disc brakes. RRP £1100 now £719.99  
ANTHEM 27.5 3  
ANTHEM 27.5 2  
ANTHEM 27.5 3  
ANTHEM X29er 3  
XT ADVANCED 27.5 3  
XT ADVANCED 27.5 2  
ANTHEM 27.5 3  
ANTHEM 27.5 2  
ANTHEM X29er 3  
TRANCE 27.5 4  
TRANCE 27.5 3  
TRANCE 27.5 1  
TRANCE X 29er 1  
rrp £719.99  
NOW £719.99



**2014 GIANT ANTHEM 27.5 3**

Alloy susp. frame, RockShox forks and shock, 20 speed Shimano Deore/SRX gearing Shimano disc brakes. RRP £1500 now £1499.99  
Deore/SRX gearing Shimano disc brakes. RRP £1100 NOW £719.99  
rrp £1100.00 NOW £719.99



**2014 SCOTT SCALE 735**

Carbon frame, RockShox XC30 Gold fork, 20 Speed Shimano Deore/XT gearing and brakes, Syncros finishing kit. RRP £1800 now £1099.99  
Carbon frame, RockShox XC30 Gold fork, 20 Speed Shimano Deore/XT gearing and brakes, Syncros finishing kit. RRP £1800 now £1099.99  
rrp £1800.00 NOW £1099.99



**2013 GIANT XTC COMPOSITE 29ER 2**

Alloy frame, X Fusion rear shock, Rockshox Reverb RL fork, 20 Speed Shimano SLX/XT Magura disc brakes. RRP £2600 now £2499.99  
rrp £2600.00 NOW £2499.99



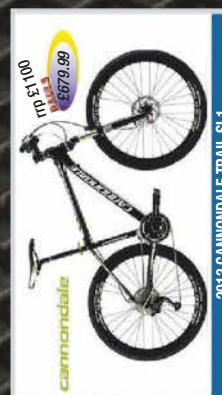
**2014 GIANT XTC ADVANCED SL 1**

Alloy frame, X Fusion rear shock, Rockshox Reverb RL fork, 20 Speed Shimano SLX/XT Magura disc brakes. RRP £2600 now £2499.99  
rrp £2600.00 NOW £2499.99



**2014 GIANT XTC ADVANCED SL 1**

Alloy frame, X Fusion rear shock, Rockshox Reverb RL fork, 20 Speed Shimano SLX/XT Magura disc brakes. RRP £2600 now £2499.99  
rrp £2600.00 NOW £2499.99



**2014 SCOTT SCALE 720**

Carbon frame, Fox Float air fork, 20 Speed Shimano Deore/XT gearing and brakes, Syncros finishing kit. RRP £1800 now £1099.99  
Carbon frame, Fox Float air fork, 20 Speed Shimano Deore/XT gearing and brakes, Syncros finishing kit. RRP £1800 now £1099.99  
rrp £1800.00 NOW £1099.99



**2014 CANNONDALE TANGO 29 5**

Womens 29er hardtail, Suntour lock out forks, 27 speed Shimano Altus/ Aria gearing, Cannondale hydraulic disc brakes. RRP £2600 now £1999.99  
rrp £2600.00 NOW £1999.99



**2013 CANNONDALE TRIGGER CRB 1**

H Mod carbon frame, Carbon Lefty fork, Fox Draf rear, 20 Spd Shimano X1/XTR, XTR Brakes, Reynolds Carbon wheels RRP £550 now £359.99  
rrp £550.00 NOW £359.99



**2014 CANNONDALE GLORY FRAME**

Alloy frame 28er, Lefty PBR 90 fork, 20 Speed Shimano Deore/SLX 9sp, Shimano hydro disc brakes. Stans wheel rims. RRP £2000 now £1999.99  
8" travel Maestro alloy suspension frame, Rockshox Vivid RLC Air rear shock, 12mm axle. RRP £2000 now £1999.99



**2013 GT KARAKORAM 1.0**

Alloy frame, RockShox XC225 fork, Shimano Alivio/Deore 27 speed gear- ing, Shimano hydraulic disc brakes. RRP £700 now £649.99  
rrp £700.00 NOW £649.99



**2013 GT KARAKORAM 1.0**

Alloy frame, RockShox XC225 fork, Shimano Alivio/Deore 27 speed gear- ing, Shimano hydraulic disc brakes. RRP £700 now £649.99  
rrp £700.00 NOW £649.99



**2013 CANNONDALE FLASH CARBON 1**

Hi Mod carbon frame, Carbon Lefty fork, Fox Draf rear, 20 Spd Shimano X1/XTR, XTR Brakes, Reynolds Carbon wheels RRP £550 now £359.99  
rrp £550.00 NOW £359.99



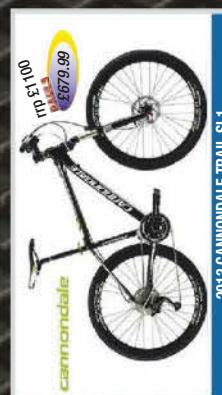
**2014 CANNONDALE SCALPEL 29ER CARBON 3**

Scalpel 29er Carbon 3  
RZ720 XL2  
SCALPEL 29ER 4  
TRIGGER CARBON 1  
TRIGGER CARBON 2  
TRAIL SL 1  
F29 1  
F29 2  
F29 3  
rrp £2500  
NOW £2399.99



**2014 CANNONDALE SCALPEL 29ER CARBON 3**

Scalpel 29er Carbon 3  
RZ720 XL2  
SCALPEL 29ER 4  
TRIGGER CARBON 1  
TRIGGER CARBON 2  
TRAIL SL 1  
F29 1  
F29 2  
F29 3  
rrp £2500  
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**2014 CANNONDALE SCALPEL 29ER CARBON 3**

Scalpel 29er Carbon 3  
RZ720 XL2  
SCALPEL 29ER 4  
TRIGGER CARBON 1  
TRIGGER CARBON 2  
TRAIL SL 1  
F29 1  
F29 2  
F29 3  
rrp £2500  
NOW £2399.99



**2013 GIANT GLORY FRAME**

Alloy frame, RockShox Vivid RLC Air rear shock, Rockshox Reverb RL fork, 20 Speed Shimano Deore/SLX 9sp, Shimano hydro disc brakes. RRP £2000 now £1999.99  
rrp £2000.00 NOW £1999.99



**2013 GIANT GLORY FRAME**

Alloy frame, RockShox Vivid RLC Air rear shock, Rockshox Reverb RL fork, 20 Speed Shimano Deore/SLX 9sp, Shimano hydro disc brakes. RRP £2000 now £1999.99  
rrp £2000.00 NOW £1999.99



**2013 GIANT GLORY FRAME**

Alloy frame, RockShox Vivid RLC Air rear shock, Rockshox Reverb RL fork, 20 Speed Shimano Deore/SLX 9sp, Shimano hydro disc brakes. RRP £2000 now £1999.99  
rrp £2000.00 NOW £1999.99



**2013 SCOTT SCALE 735**

Access WLS  
AMS RWA 29  
LTD RACE  
REACTION GTC PRO 27.5  
REACTION GTC PRO 29  
rrp £380  
NOW £299.99  
rrp £380  
NOW £299.99  
rrp £1500  
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rrp £1400  
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rrp £500  
NOW £399.99  
rrp £1900  
NOW £1399.99  
rrp £1600  
NOW £999.99



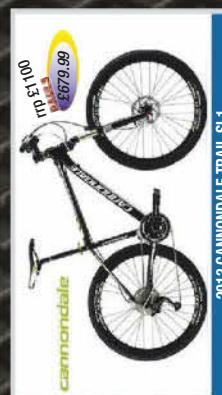
**2014 SCOTT SCALE 735**

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LTD RACE  
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rrp £1900  
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rrp £1600  
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**2014 SCOTT SCALE 735**

Access WLS  
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LTD RACE  
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REACTION GTC PRO 29  
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NOW £999.99



**2014 SCOTT SCALE 735**

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rrp £400  
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rrp £500  
NOW £399.99  
rrp £1900  
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rrp £1600  
NOW £999.99

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2013 GT Karakoram 1.0

Alloy frame, RockShox XC225 fork, Shimano Alivio/Deore 27 speed gear- ing, Shimano hydraulic disc brakes. RRP £700 now £649.99

2013 GT Karakoram 1.0

Alloy frame, RockShox XC225 fork, Shimano Alivio/Deore 27 speed gear- ing, Shimano hydraulic disc brakes. RRP £700 now £649.99

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**WEIGHT UP**

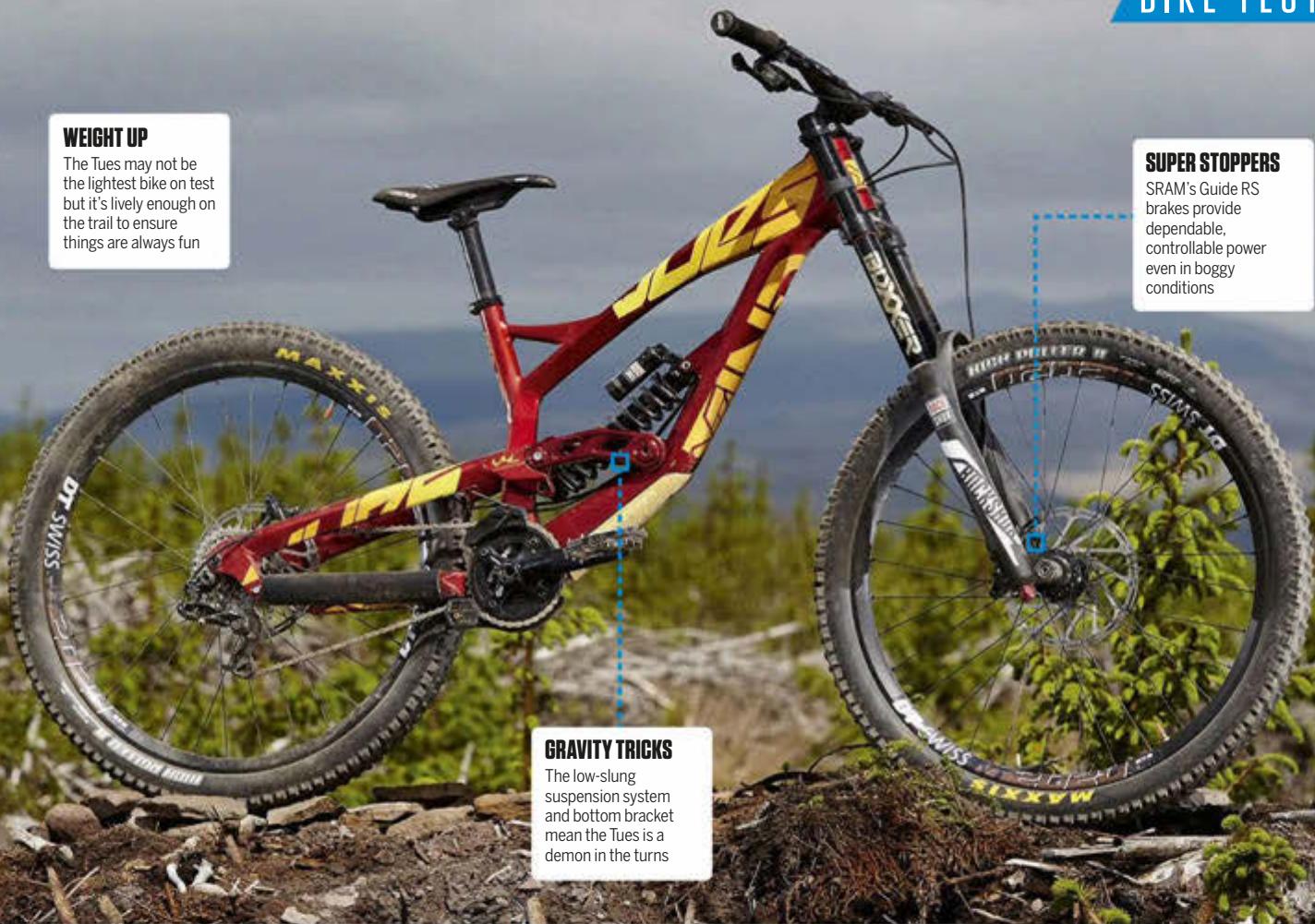
The Tues may not be the lightest bike on test but it's lively enough on the trail to ensure things are always fun

**SUPER STOPPERS**

SRAM's Guide RS brakes provide dependable, controllable power even in boggy conditions

**GRAVITY TRICKS**

The low-slung suspension system and bottom bracket mean the Tues is a demon in the turns



# YT INDUSTRIES TUES AL COMP

**€3,088.80 (approx £2,184)** inc boxing & shipping

*Can YT's DH sled live up to the hype?*

**SO GOOD**

Balanced suspension and great geometry  
Smooth, supple yet supportive fork  
Stable at speed but still agile enough on slower trails

**NO GOOD**

Low spring rate means shock won't suit lighter riders

**JARGON BUSTER****Press-fit BB**

A bottom bracket with large bearings that are pushed, not screwed, into the frame. Tight tolerances mean poor-fitting PF BBS are prone to wear and creaking.

**Progressive**

A spring that becomes harder to compress as it moves through its travel.

**A**nother German direct-buy brand, relative newcomers YT's Capra CF trail bike took top marks in one of our bike tests last year so we had high expectations for their well priced, impressively specced downhill bike. How would it deliver when the going got tough though?

**The frame**

The most eye-catching frame on test, the Tues has some unusual lines and tube shapes that divided opinion within our test team. The head tube is almost completely engulfed by the down tube and the more bulbous and prominent top tube – a design YT have dubbed the 'Headbox' – which helps create one tough front end.

YT's Virtual Four Link (V4L) four-bar suspension system is packaged nice and low down in the frame to dramatically drop the bike's centre of mass, and delivers 200mm (7.9in) of well-tuned rear wheel travel via a RockShox Vivid R2C shock. Our medium test bike came with a 225lb spring, which felt pretty much perfect for testers around the 70kg mark.

Lighter riders may struggle though, because the lightest Vivid spring available is 200lb.

While the other three bikes on test use traditional threaded bottom brackets, YT have gone down the press-fit route. This won't please everyone, but we had no issues with the BB during testing, even after some really hard riding.

The 63-degree head angle tallies nicely with every other bike here, as do the 1,208mm wheelbase and 338mm chainstays. To complement all that low-slung weight, YT have kept the bottom bracket height to a corner-railing 340mm, the lowest on test. The Tues is also one of only two bikes here to get 650b wheels.

**The kit**

Just like the Canyon, the Tues AL Comp gets a Boxter Team fork with RockShox's seriously smooth Charger damper, which features adjustable low-speed compression and rebound damping. A pair of Maxxis High Roller II Super Tacky tyres dish out consistent, predictable grip in myriad trail conditions, while SRAM's Guide RS

brakes offer plenty of punch and modulation even in the wet. The SRAM X9 Type 2 10-speed rear mech may not be as flash as the XO1 DH mech on the Canyon, but if and when you damage it – something that doesn't tend to take downhill riders that long – it won't be as expensive to replace. Finding a spare at a race weekend should be easier too.

The Vivid R2C shock may not have all the bells and whistles of the Cane Creek but it has a smooth, controlled feel and is easy to get dialled in. The whopping 800mm Race Face Atlas bar feels comfy and means those with a penchant for that extra bit of width won't be disappointed.

**The ride**

Straight off the line, it's clear that the Tues is keen on one thing and one thing only – going fast. It takes just a couple of pedal strokes before you feel really at ease aboard the YT. The proportions and riding position just feel right from the get-go.

Hit the first technical section and the balance front to rear is impressive and confidence inspiring. YT have



**THERE'S AN AGILE, PLAYFUL ELEMENT TO THE TUES THAT MAKES MORE MELLOW, JUMP-RIDDLED TRACKS A LOT OF FUN**

done a great job with the suspension, producing a nicely progressive rear end that really rewards the harder rider. It's not uncomfortable or harsh in any way, just a smooth stroke that ramps up towards the end before touching full travel and offers a decent amount of feedback so you know what's going on beneath your tyres.

Push it harder and harder and the speed will keep increasing without the Tues ever feeling out of its depth. Though it's certainly not the 'point and

plough' machine that the Pulse can be, it'll still let you make mistakes, veer off line and keep you out of trouble should you take your eye off the ball for a split second too long. On more physical tracks where the bike needs to be launched, hopped and lofted, there's an agile, playful element to the Tues that makes more mellow, jump-riddled tracks a lot of fun.

That low centre of mass and bottom bracket mean the YT is keen to rail turns as hard as you're comfortable

doing so too. It takes quite a bit to unstick the Super Tacky High Roller IIs – their predictable bite is a racer favourite for good reason. As a complete package, the Tues really does tick a lot of boxes and offers great value for money – and a lot of fun. »

#### MBUK

The proportions, balance and control of the Tues mean this is one seriously fast bike, making it great for aspiring racers



# RIP IT UP TEAR IT DOWN

SAM DALE | Credit: Laurence Cosman-Emms

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## ZENITH

### HOODED SOFTSHELL & SHORTS

Sambo's rocking the Zenith hooded softshell and shorts. Built strong to cope with the rough British trails, the Zenith collection features stretch fabrics for maximum movement and water repellent to bead off the worst of the trail grime.

TITLE SPONSOR

**MADISON**  
**SARACEN**  
FACTORY RACE TEAM



**TWEEDLOVE**  
OFFICIAL CLOTHING PARTNER

**MADISON**  
CYCLE EVERYWEAR

# THE SPEC DECK



	VITUS DOMINER	NUKEPROOF PULSE COMP	CANYON TORQUE DHX ROCKZONE	YT INDUSTRIES TUES AL COMP
PRICE	£2,399.99 inc boxing & shipping	£2,599.99	£2,446.98 inc boxing & shipping	£3,088.80 (approx £2,184) inc boxing & shipping
DISTRIBUTOR	<a href="http://www.vitusbikes.com">www.vitusbikes.com</a>	<a href="http://www.hotlines-uk.com">www.hotlines-uk.com</a>	<a href="http://www.canyon.com">www.canyon.com</a>	<a href="http://www.yt-industries.com">www.yt-industries.com</a>
WEIGHT	17.33kg (38.21lb)	18.46kg (40.70lb)	16.78kg (36.99lb)	17.90kg (39.46lb)
FRAME	Hydroformed 6061-T6 aluminium, 200mm (7.9in) travel	Hydroformed 6061-T6 aluminium, 210mm (8.3in) travel	Hydroformed aluminium, 195-210mm (7.7-8.3in) travel	Butted 7075-T6 aluminium, 200mm (7.9in) travel
SIZES	S, M (tested), L	S, M (tested), L, XL	S, M (tested), L	S, M (tested), L
FORK	Marzocchi 380 CR, 200mm (7.9in) travel	RockShox Boxxer RC, 200mm (7.9in) travel	RockShox Boxxer Team, 200mm (7.9in) travel	RockShox Boxxer Team, 200mm (7.9in) travel
SHOCK	RockShox Kage RC	RockShox Kage RC	Cane Creek Double Barrel	RockShox Vivid R2C
HEADSET	Cane Creek	Nukeproof	Cane Creek 40	Acros AZX-205
WHEELS	<b>Hubs:</b> Funn DH Disc <b>Rims:</b> WTB Frequency Team i25 TCS <b>Spokes:</b> Stainless, double butted <b>Wheel Weight:</b> 2.72kg F, 2.99kg R (including tyres)	<b>Hubs:</b> Nukeproof Generator Disc <b>Rims:</b> Nukeproof Generator DH TCS <b>Spokes:</b> Stainless, plain gauge <b>Wheel Weight:</b> 2.62kg F, 3kg R (including tyres)	<b>Hubs:</b> DT Swiss 350 <b>Rims:</b> DT Swiss FR600 <b>Spokes:</b> Stainless, plain gauge <b>Wheel Weight:</b> 2.8kg F, 2.95kg R (including tyres)	<b>Hubs:</b> DT Swiss YT2020 <b>Rims:</b> DT Swiss YT2020 <b>Spokes:</b> Stainless, plain gauge <b>Wheel Weight:</b> 2.72kg F, 3.2kg R (including tyres)
TYRES	Maxxis High Roller II Super Tacky DH, 27.5x2.4in	Schwalbe Magic Mary DH VertStar, 26x2.35in	Maxxis Shorty 3C MaxxGrip, 26x2.4in (F)/Maxxis Minion DHR II MaxxTerra, 26x2.4in (R)	Maxxis High Roller II Super Tacky, 27.5x2.4in (F)/Maxxis High Roller II MaxxPro, 27.5x2.4in (R)
CRANKSET/BOTTOM BRACKET	Shimano Zee, 34t/ Shimano Hollowtech II	Truvativ Hussefelt, 36t/SRAM GXP	Truvativ Descendant, 36t/ SRAM GXP	Truvativ Descendant, 36t/ SRAM GXP
CHAIN GUIDE/REAR DERAILLEUR	e*thirteen LG1+/ Shimano Zee Shadow Plus	e*thirteen LG1/SRAM X7	e*thirteen LG1+/ SRAM X01 DH	e*thirteen LG1+/ SRAM X9 Type 2
SHIFTERS	Shimano Zee, 10-speed	SRAM X7, 10-speed	SRAM X01, seven-speed	SRAM X9, 10-speed
CASSETTE/CHAIN	Shimano 105, 11-25t/KMC X10	SRAM PG-1030, 11-26t/ SRAM PC-1031	SRAM X01 DH Mini Block/ KMC X11-93	SRAM PG-1050, 11-28t/ SRAM PC-1051
BRAKES	Shimano Zee	SRAM DB5	SRAM Guide RS	SRAM Guide RS
BAR/STEM/GRIPS	Vitus, 760mm/ Funn RSX Light, 45-50mm/ Vitus lock-on	Nukeproof Warhead, 760mm/ Nukeproof Direct Mount, 45mm/ Nukeproof Element single lock-on	Renthal Fatbar, 780mm/ Renthal Integra, 45-50mm/ Canyon Torque DHX	Race Face Atlas 35, 800mm/ Race Face Atlas DM 35, 50mm/ Sensus Disisdaboss
SADDLE/SEATPOST	Vitus/Funn Kratos	Nukeproof Speed/ Nukeproof Warhead	SDG I-Fly/SDG I-Beam	SDG I-Fly YT/SDG Micro I-Beam
DIMENSIONS				
FRAME ANGLES	Head 63.2° Seat 61.5°	Head 63.6° Seat 66.4°	Head 62.7° Seat 67.7°	Head 63.1° Seat 71.5°
VERDICT	<b>MBUK</b> ★★★★★	<b>MBUK</b> ★★★★★	<b>MBUK</b> ★★★★★	<b>MBUK</b> ★★★★★
	A little top heavy in the turns but stable and confidence inspiring when things gets fast and furious	The Pulse has plenty of potential and likes to be ridden really hard. A damper upgrade in the fork would make the most of this bike	The Canyon is a fun, playful downhill rig that's specced with some of the best kit available	The proportions, balance and control of the Tues mean this is one seriously fast bike, making it great for aspiring racers

**WHAT OUR SCORES MEAN:** We give each bike one overall score to sum up how it performs and its value for money. If a bike gets a score of five, it really is the best you can get in terms of both



Poor: simply put,  
don't bother



Below average:  
flawed in some way



Good: it'll do the  
job and do it well



Very good: one of  
the best you can buy



Exceptional: a  
genuine class leader



## FINAL VERDICT

**T**here's no weak link among the four bikes here. While the **Vitus** has a little less edge and aggression in the turns than the other three, its long wheelbase and 650b wheels mean it'll still get trucking through the rough stuff without hesitation. If the brakes were a bit sharper, it could be ridden even harder. The **Nukeproof** is the

monster truck of the test, and is truly at home smashing its way down steep, rough terrain. While its weight holds it back in certain situations, it's the fork that ultimately stifles performance. It's the only one of the four that's available from bricks-and-mortar shops as well as online though, which makes things easier if you want to demo it before buying or

encounter any problems. There's no getting away from the high-end build that adorns the **Canyon**, and it helps to keep the weight down and produce a lively ride that's a hell of a lot of fun. The **YT** edges the win though, thanks to its more neutral riding position and better balanced suspension. It's a great bike that'll do any budding downhill demon proud.

NEXT MONTH

**£1,200-£1,500 aggro hardtails**  
Less faff, more fun? ON SALE 24 JULY

**MBUK**

# WRECKED & RATED

## Group Test

# TRAIL SHORTS

We've rounded up 15 of the latest baggies to find the best pair for your riding and wallet

Words & Pics Russell Burton

### VENTS

Vents can come in the form of mesh sections that can be zipped closed or simple perforations in the fabric of the shorts. They create airflow that helps keep you cool – particularly useful in heavier-weight shorts.

### DURABLE PANELS

Abrasion-resistant fabric is often used on the seat, crotch and/or legs to prevent wear in the most vulnerable areas.

### WAIST ADJUSTERS

These Velcro tabs help you dial in the perfect fit. In our experience, the adjusters that pull from back to front generally work best.

### WAISTBAND

Look for a waist that's higher at the back than at the front – this makes for a more secure fit once you're in the saddle.

### FABRIC

When it comes to material, your riding style will dictate whether you should go lightweight, super-durable or somewhere in between the two.

## MBUK Ratings

WE BASE OUR SCORES ON VALUE FOR MONEY AND PERFORMANCE

**★★★★★**

**EXCEPTIONAL:**  
A genuine class leader

**★★★★★**

**VERY GOOD:** One of the best you can buy

**★★★★★**

**GOOD:** It'll do the job and do it well

**★★★★★**

**BELOW AVERAGE:**  
Flawed in some way

**★★★★★**

**POOR:** Simply put, don't bother!



## THE TESTER

**Russell Burton**  
Russell rides many miles a month in pursuit of the perfect picture. This is demanding on kit, which has to be comfy and perform well all day. If kit passes muster with him, chances are it will with you too.

# What to look for

## How to find baggies that make the cut

**W**HEN IT COMES to shorts there are two key words – cut and fabrication. Everything else is just window dressing. The cut is key because the shorts need to fit. Remember how long it took you to set up your bike ‘just so’? Throwing on the nearest set of shorts because they seem roomy enough or look really, really cool will undo all that careful fettling because you’ll spend the whole ride hitching them up to spare your riding pals blushes, unhooking saddle snags or just being plain uncomfortable.

Start by looking at the waistband. If it’s flat (the front and back are the same height) it’ll inevitably pull down at the back once you’re on the bike. Look for a waist with a back that curves above the front. Deeper bands tend to feel more secure and more comfortable, and if they’re made from mesh or are soft-lined, so much the better. You’ll be lucky to find a pair of shorts that fits without adjustment. In most cases you’ll need either belt loops or built-in adjusters. In our experience, Velcro tabs that pull from back to front work best, helping to snug that nice deep waistband against you and stop the shorts descending as you ride.

As much as you want the waist to stay put, you need the rest of the shorts to move, and how efficiently they do that is down to either the cut, the fabric or a combination of both. A stretchy back yoke (or use of stretchy material throughout) allows you to



pedal and move around without the waist being pulled down. Shaped panels that articulate with your body allow a slimmer profile because the legs don’t need to be cut wide to accommodate movement.

In terms of fabric, consider whether you need shorts that offer heavier-weight protection or are, at the other extreme, lightweight and race ready. You can be fussy and want both – designs like this do exist but tend to be more expensive. A compromise is to look for heavier shorts that have perforations to increase airflow or vents that can be unzipped as needed.

Pockets come down to personal preference. Our mantra is that any provided should be proper pockets – deep enough at the front, no sharp edges on zips, decent zip-pulls and angled so the contents don’t hit the trail before you do. After that, the number of them is up to you.

Finally, if you have a favourite set of underpinnings then you may not want to splash out on shorts that come with a liner, but there are some high-quality combos now that give almost two-for-one value.

## HOW WE TESTED THEM

**WE'RE NOT IMMUNE** to standing in front of a mirror and admiring a good pair of shorts but once the ‘fresh from the packet’ assessment has been done (and all joking aside, it is important in terms of assessing quality and fit) the riding can begin. For consistency, we’ve tested all of these shorts on a mix of trails and on long days out on the bike – design glitches or fit problems that may not be noticed on a short blast will always out themselves after several hours in the saddle.

We judge against four criteria in order to arrive at our final score. Fit is the first of these, simply because if the cut of the shorts isn’t good enough and they don’t fit properly, everything else is irrelevant. Next we consider the fabric – whether rugged or whisper-light, does it do its job? The third element is construction – how well are the shorts made and what functionality do they incorporate? Finally we look at value, and whether or not the combination of all of the above is worth investing your money in.



## JARGON BUSTER

### > Back yoke

The upper back part of the shorts, below the waistband. Often made from a different (stretch) fabric to the rest of the shorts to increase movement.

### > Flex channels

Grooves in the padded part of the liner that allow it to flex and mould to your shape.

### > Grown-on waistband

Waistband formed by turning down the top edge of the shorts rather than attaching a separate piece of fabric. Because there’s no seam, it’s more comfortable.

### > Liner

Padded inner shorts that fit tightly, like traditional cycling shorts. Most can be removed from the outer

shell, which gives you the option of buying extras or using the shell over tights in colder weather.

### > Rise

The length between crotch and waist. Getting this right is crucial to the overall fit – too long and you’ll get an excess of fabric at the front of the shorts that could snag on the saddle.

### > Shell

Term used to describe the outer shorts on pairs supplied with a padded liner.

### > Vents

These are included on heavier-weight shorts for cooling. They usually come in the form of perforations or mesh inserts that can be unzipped as required.

### > Wicking

Wicking is the transfer of moisture (sweat and rainwater) from your skin to the outer surface of the shorts, where it can more easily evaporate. Wicking fabrics are often used at strategic points that contact your skin, like the waistband and liner pad, to increase comfort, especially on long rides.



PADDED LINER: Yes

**Dainese Drifter**£84.95 Windwave [www.windwave.co.uk](http://www.windwave.co.uk)

**THE POPPING COLOUR,** lightweight fabric and inclusion of a removable liner raised our spirits, but once actually riding we didn't hit it off with the Dainese shorts. The liner doesn't have a lot of shape and there's a happy-like sag to the pad that makes it uncomfortable.

The outer shell is light and durable-feeling but it's let down by a construction that's dependent on the shorts being a perfect fit. There's

no adjustment, just room for expansion thanks to an elasticated waistband, and that has a tendency to pull down – a problem exacerbated by there being no curve or extra height at the back of the waist.

Worn on their own the Drifters are cool boardshorts but they just don't transition on to the bike as well as they should.



PADDED LINER: No

**ION Vertex**£75 Ion [www.ionproducts.com](http://www.ionproducts.com)

**ANOTHER PAIR OF** surf style shorts, these ones work on the bike – in parts. The boxy cut is 'hanging around' casual but its lack of shape makes them lower at the back of the waist than we'd like and baggier in the front rise, which makes the crotch more likely to catch on your saddle. They do stay up though, thanks to secure waist adjusters.

The combination of fabrics is well thought through – the main body

has a smooth, quality feel, more durable material is used on the inner thighs and there's a deep, stretchy back yoke that allows lots of movement. We did find these some of the warmest shorts on test, even with leg perforations to generate a bit of airflow. And while a neoprene phone holder may sound like a good idea, we didn't like the extra bulk.



PADDED LINER: No

**POC Trail**£75 2pure [www.2pure.co.uk](http://www.2pure.co.uk)

**WE'RE FANS OF** POC's signature styling – bright colours combined with simple cuts and unfussy logos. On their Trail shorts that translates into a clean, casual, understated look that's great off the bike.

Although the shape is neater than many boardshort style shorts, the waistband is still straight. That means when you're riding it feels like there's too much material at the front and the waist sits too low at the

back. Where the Trails gained favour with us was with the quality of the fabric – a stretchy nylon mix that feels durably protective but doesn't get too hot and has a cottony feel on the inside that elevates the comfort factor further.

These aren't our favourites for hard-pedalling rides but we do like their style for more relaxed trail days.



PADDED LINER: Yes

**Altura Attack 180**£69.99 Zyro [www.zyro.co.uk](http://www.zyro.co.uk)

**THE ATTACK 180S** deliver a lot of functionality for the money. They come with a padded liner that moulds well to your shape and sits comfortably in place on the bike. The legs are on the short side though, and on taller testers that led to them feeling more like pants than inner shorts.

The outer shell is a good shape, with a curved back to the waist and generous Velcro tabs that let you

achieve a snug, secure fit. The mid-weight fabric has a durable feel and just the right degree of stretch. It's fairly warm but mesh inserts help prevent things getting too hot.

We like the slim cut and neat shape, and if you're tall you'll appreciate the length as well. Overall these offer a good fit and functionality at a sensible price.





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PADDED LINER: No

## Race Face Trigger

£69.95 Silverfish [www.silverfish-uk.com](http://www.silverfish-uk.com)

**THEY SAY THE** devil is in the detail, and it's the detailing on the Triggers that gives clues to Race Face's long heritage making hard-riding kit for some of the planet's best freeriders.

The extra-high back to the waist and long internal Velcro adjuster tabs create a super-secure fit. Combined with a stretchy back yoke and a grippy print logo at the back of the waist, this means that

no matter how much you move around on the bike these non-slip shorts go with you – we didn't experience any problems with saddle snagging at all.

We like the long zip-pulls too – not something that every manufacturer bothers with on shorts – and the fabric is very light without being floaty.

**MBUK** ★★★★☆



PADDED LINER: Yes

## Bontrager Lithos

£100 Bontrager [www.bontrager.com](http://www.bontrager.com)

**BONTRAGER KIT NORMALLY** has all the features nailed, and that's certainly the case with the Lithos shorts. The curved waistband is mesh lined and the waist adjusters and zip-pulls are rubberised. This sort of functionality can pass unnoticed but it makes a comfort and practical difference.

The cut is immaculate too, and is especially suited to tall riders who'll appreciate the long leg length, which

comes without too much extra flap. We like the neat way these shorts sit – the slim profile belies the amount of freedom of movement they give. There are a couple of niggles – the liner pad is on the firm side when new and the heavy print feels plasticky, though it doesn't sit against the skin and helps reinforce the punched vents on the legs.

**MBUK** ★★★★☆



PADDED LINER: Yes

## Alpinestars Pathfinder

£79.99 i-ride [www.i-ride.co.uk](http://www.i-ride.co.uk)

**THE PATHFINDERS HAVE** an instantly durable feeling courtesy of their rip-stop fabric, which, combined with the long leg length, gives them a reassuringly protective – but not heavy – feel. They also tick many of the boxes on our list of favourite features, having a high-curved back, easy-grab zip-pulls, secure fit adjustment and a deep, stretchy back yoke, and all put together in a way that works. The rise

is good, keeping everything clean at the front to complement the movement through the legs.

The liner is relatively heavy, gets sweaty and would benefit from being made from mesh, but the pad itself is deep and has multiple flex channels, so despite feeling firm when new it does mould to your shape and stays in place well.

**MBUK** ★★★★★



PADDED LINER: No

## Endura MT500 Spray

£65 Endura [www.endura.co.uk](http://www.endura.co.uk)

**ENDURA KIT ALWAYS** seems to be designed with one eye on the great British weather and the MT500 Sprays have, as their name would suggest, a sprayproof panel at the rear. This is no lightweight, 'keep the worst of the water off' feature though – the whole section is fully waterproof, made from triple-layer fabric with sealed seams.

When combined with a lighter-weight material on the front and

legs, as well as generous zipped vents, the result is shorts that keep you (mainly) dry but are more versatile in warmer weather than full-on waterproof numbers. We'd prefer to see a higher back to the waist – the cut is flat, with an elasticated insert, so it's not as secure as some and relies on a webbing belt to keep the shorts up.

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PADDED LINER: No

**Madison Flux**£59.99 Madison [www.madison.cc](http://www.madison.cc)

**THE FIRST IMPRESSION** of the Flux shorts is just how well built the waist is. The deep waistband can be adjusted with substantial Velcro tabs, which have a fairly rigid feel but don't move once set. Combined with non-slip silicone print at the rear of the waist and solid double fasteners, the result is shorts that are both secure and comfortable.

They're not the lightest and do get warm but they have a durable

feel and the construction quality would be good at any price, and exceptional at this one. Combined with details such as stash pockets (there are two, in addition to the zipped front pockets) and perforated venting, this means the Fluxes have both the specification and ride quality to go up against much more expensive shorts.



PADDED LINER: Yes

**Troy Lee Designs Ruckus**£99.99 Fisher Outdoor Leisure [www.fisheroutdoor.co.uk](http://www.fisheroutdoor.co.uk)**THESE HARD-WORKING**

all-rounders are some of the priciest shorts on test, but if you have a bit extra in your budget, then the specification means this baggy/liner combo is worth consideration.

The shell isn't super-light but can handle a fair bit of abuse. We thought we might get too warm but leg vents, mesh inserts and a mesh liner ensured we didn't overheat despite encountering a wide range of

unpredictable UK temperatures during testing. The high back cinches in nice and close with rubberised tabs and the waistband is lined with brushed microfibre, ensuring a bombproof fit and high level of comfort. The fit through the rise is perfect, and combined with the stretchy rear yoke it gives non-snagging freedom of movement.



PADDED LINER: Yes

**Scott Trail 20**£95 Scott Sports [www.scott-sports.com](http://www.scott-sports.com)

**WITH THEIR SMOOTH** fabric and roomy cut the Trail 20s feel strange compared to many of the 'slim baggies' we've been testing. Scott's approach does work though.

Because the cut is close around the hips and internal fit adjusters ensure that the back waist holds firm (despite not being that high), there's no excess material round the backside but leg movement is unrestricted. We like the simplicity of

the outer, though the chunkiness of the pocket fastenings rankles and the build quality could be better.

The liner really delivers though – in fact, we've found ourselves pinching it to wear under other shorts. Smooth, with mesh panels and a pad that's flexible, perforated and has a wicking cover, it sets the standard for the rest to follow.



PADDED LINER: No

**Fox Demo Freeride**£85 Fox [www.foxhead.com](http://www.foxhead.com)

**TALLER RIDERS SEEKING** a heavier-weight short to take on all comers should sign up here. Uncomplicated styling combined with serious attention to the details that matter puts these shorts high on our wishlist.

The fit is excellent. The 'wrap' front with ratchet fastening is easy to adjust, stays put and is extremely comfy. The panel construction articulates, which means the legs

don't need to be overly baggy, and it works in conjunction with the stretchy back yoke, which provides ventilation as well as movement.

The comfort of the Demos has consistently impressed. Somehow there are three pockets secreted in these minimal shorts. Look closer to see them and you'll notice the rugged twin-needle stitching too.



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# WINNERS



PADDED LINER: Yes

## 7mesh Glidepath

£90 7mesh [www.7meshinc.com](http://www.7meshinc.com)

**THOUSANDS OF TEST** miles and years of wearing hundreds of different products haven't dimmed our enthusiasm for new kit, but with standards and functionality so much improved it takes an exceptional product to grab our attention in the way that the Glidepaths have. They share many of their functional details with other shorts – it's the way these have been combined that makes them stand out.

The grown-on waistband and high, curving back give a great fit, with the lack of a seam at the waist meaning there's nothing to dig in. We used the webbing adjusters (with locking buckles) to dial in the fit but there are belt loops too. It's not complicated but the diamond-shaped crotch not only gives a seamless ride (which

### Tester says...

"There's such a wide range of shorts to choose from now that there really is no need to compromise. It's no surprise that you tend to get what you pay for. What was a surprise was to find a newcomer that nailed it right out of the gate. I'm never giving the Glidepaths back."



we appreciated when we threw these on sans liner for a trip to the pub) but makes for easy pedalling without the legs needing to be oversized. Bonded hems are a nice finishing touch – they complement the fabric which, despite its light weight, feels tough as..."

The fit and fabric meet our high standards, together delivering shorts that we barely felt we were wearing. The pockets are pretty much perfect too. The front ones are zip-free for ease of casual slouching while the zipped ones aren't only angled for ease of access on the fly, they also have inner sections in which you can stash small things so they don't rattle around when you do.

**MBUK** ★★★★☆



PADDED LINER: Yes

## Mavic Red Rock

£75 Mavic [www.mavic.com](http://www.mavic.com)

**THERE ARE CHEAPER** shorts but the Red Rocks are unusual in that both the shell and liner are exceptional.

The outer shorts are ultra-light and ultra-simple, with no unnecessary detailing. The curved waist has no adjusters, only belt loops, but we wore it without a belt and it still stayed securely in place, with unlimited movement through the legs.

We love the riding comfort of these shorts, especially in

warmer weather when the fact they're underpinned by a quality liner makes a huge difference. The inner shorts combine a solid knit where you want, um, more modesty with a fantastically light mesh on the legs, and the pad itself is generous where you need it and lighter and more flexible where you don't, as well as having a soft-touch wicking cover.

**MBUK** ★★★★☆



PADDED LINER: No

## Gore Alp-X Pro Windstopper

£109.99 Gore Bike Wear [www.gorebikewear.co.uk](http://www.gorebikewear.co.uk)

**THESE HIGH-PERFORMANCE** shorts are designed for multi-day trips when you have to contend with mixed weather with minimal kit, making them ideal for your average day on a UK trail too.

We were dubious about the slim cut to begin with, but on the bike the shaping and the stretch in the fabric mean you don't need any extra material. That fabric is Gore Windstopper Soft Shell, which blocks wind and keeps off that special chill

that sets about your thighs after a descent in freezing rain. We expected to overheat when things warmed up but they proved surprisingly adaptable to sunnier days too.

Superb functionality comes in the form of a gripper waistband, simple drawcord waist, abrasion-resistant seat and non-chafe hems – the quality of construction is unmatched.

**MBUK** ★★★★☆

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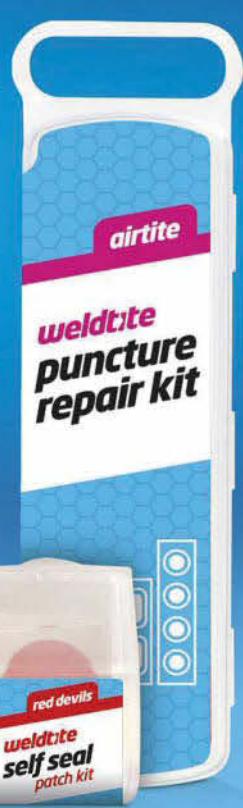
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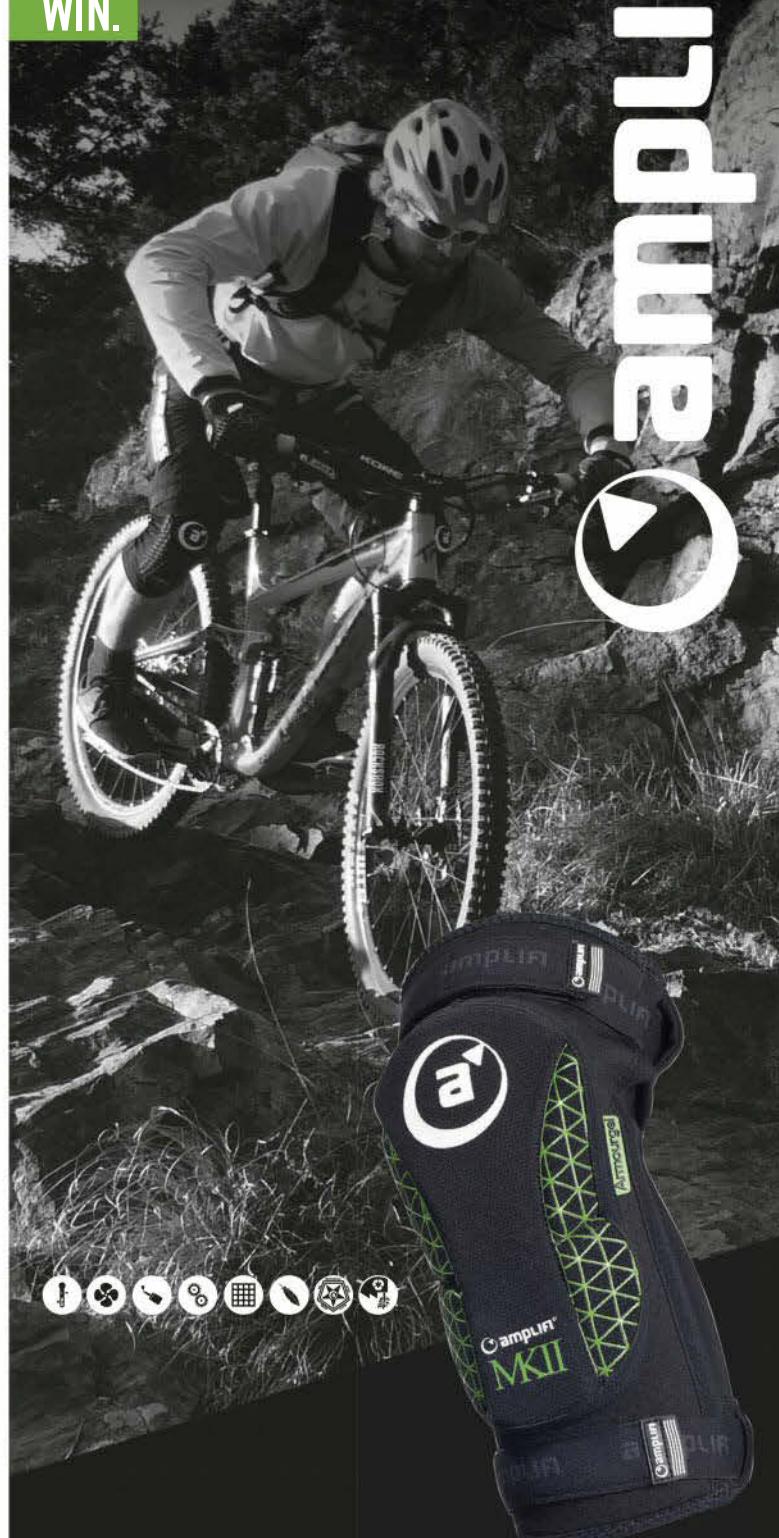
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# MBUK Manual

THE SKILLS, KNOWLEDGE & PLACES TO  
GO FOR A BETTER RIDE

P148 HOW TO...

## THE FUNDAMENTALS: BODY POSITION

Sort your bike set-up and stance to get yourself ready to ride better and faster



P154 GRIMETIME



Get your Crank Bros Mallet pedals spinning smoothly again with our step-by-step guide

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Your questions, our answers, all of your mechanical problems solved

P158 THE BIG RIDE

A classic XC ride taking in rolling Wiltshire hills, Salisbury Plain and Longleat House

MBUK'S ROUTE EXPERT



All our route maps are put together by route guru **Max Darkins**. Max loves travelling the country in search of the best trails and is also the man behind [www.roughrideguide.co.uk](http://www.roughrideguide.co.uk)

P168 WRECKING CREW

## CASTLEWELLAN, NORTHERN IRELAND

We visit the surprise hit of the province's newly developed trail centre network





ABOUT PRO  
RIDE GUIDES

Pro Ride Guides teach skills training in the UK. The team is headed up by Joe Rafferty who has 10 years' coaching experience. Elite riders and skilled coaches Ben Deakin and Joe Flanagan are also part of the crew, as are enduro racers Phil and Sam Shucksmith.

[www.proridemtb.com](http://www.proridemtb.com)

# the fundamentals BODY POSITION

**Sort your bike set-up and body position to get yourself ready to ride better and faster**

In this five-part series, we're going to explain the basic mountain bike techniques that are essential if you want to improve quickly, right up to advanced techniques for getting air and riding technical trails with confidence and flow.

Understanding how to ride well doesn't mean you have to become an expert, it just means that you know how to feel good on your bike, and what works and why

other things don't work. We've coached thousands of riders over the years, and we always see the biggest improvements in those who nail the basics, even over those who have decades of riding experience. If you're just starting out, perfecting these skills will help you improve fast, and if you're an experienced rider, you'll find that nailing these core skills will help you ride smoother and take your riding to the next level.

# BIKE SETUP

Whatever your riding style or discipline, follow these tips to make sure your bike is working as well as it can for you



## 1 SUSPENSION SAG

Check the manufacturer's recommendations for the correct sag measurements for your fork and rear shock – these are usually around 30 per cent for the shock and 25 per cent for the fork. It's important that you run the correct amount of sag to balance your bike. Measure your fork sag by standing up in your neutral position, and your rear sag by sitting on the saddle. Make sure you're in your full riding gear and have no compression settings turned on.

## 2 SUSPENSION REBOUND

Rebound damping controls the speed that your shock recovers at after a compression. It's usually a red dial on your fork and shock. Once your sag is correct, set your rebound to its medium setting as a starting point. Too fast and your bike will feel skittish and lose grip, too slow and your suspension will feel harsh. You can tune this out on the trail to your preference.



## 3 SADDLE HEIGHT

Even with a dropper post it's important to get your saddle height correct for good pedalling efficiency and to prevent lower back or muscle pain. With your saddle in its highest position, drop one pedal so your cranks are vertical and place your heel on the pedal. Your leg should be perfectly straight, which will give

# BODY POSITION BASICS

When the trail gets rough your bike will start to buck and move around. The idea of good body position is to isolate your core mass (your head and torso) from this chatter so you can stay smooth, in control and in balance. If you try to stop the bike pitching over the terrain, you've effectively picked a fight with gravity, and it'll eventually win. Use these tips to put yourself in a position where you can let the bike move beneath you and you can stay in balance and relaxed.

### • LOSEN UP

If you're in balance, you can loosen up and allow the bike to move around underneath you and track the terrain. Use your arms and legs like suspension by absorbing undulations on the trail.

### • STAND UP

It goes without saying that if you sit down on rough terrain you're going to feel like you're riding a bucking bronco! Stand up, lower your chest and keep a slight bend in your knees for extra control.

### • WEIGHT DISTRIBUTION

Drop your heels and support your core mass with your legs and not your hands. This will get your weight low at the bottom bracket, which is stable, and free your arms up for control and steering. Think heavy feet, light hands.

### • HEELS DOWN

With your cranks perfectly level, place the ball of your foot on the pedal axle or just in front of it, in a midfoot position, and drop your heels towards the ground.

**● HEAD UP**

Your head position affects your balance so get your chin up and focus on the trail ahead. Try not to look down at the front tyre as it will unbalance you straight away.

**● ELBOWS UP**

Bend your elbows and hold them up so you can use your arms to control and lean the bike.

**● CORE**

Try not to round your lower back like you're slouched in a chair – it isn't good for power and efficiency when it comes to more advanced skills. Stick your bum out and engage your core muscles.

**● BRAKING**

Always cover your brakes with one finger just in case you need to scrub speed or stop quickly.

# BIKE SETUP CONT



you a slight bend when you put your foot back in its normal pedalling position.

## 4 TYRE PRESSURES

Our base settings for a 75kg rider are 25psi front and 27psi rear on durable tubeless tyres. Pressure is always compromised by puncture resistance and tyre stability, so riders with light tyres or heavier riders may need to add a few more psi, and vice versa. Changes in tyre pressure can make a massive difference to the feel of your bike so it's worth noting down your optimal pressures and sticking to them. A lot of riders think pumping the tyres up hard is faster, but on rough terrain it's actually slower.

## 5 ONE-FINGER BRAKING

Getting your brakes in the right position for one-finger braking will improve your control. Put your hand on the grip and extend your index finger out. It should be at the very end of the brake lever for maximum control and leverage. The most common fault is to have the brake too near to your grip, which means you can't use only one finger to brake. Undo the clamps and push each brake inwards on the bar if they're too close.

## 6 SADDLE TILT

Like it or not, most mountain bikers spend the majority of their time riding uphill. Adjust your saddle so it's level or tilt the nose downwards slightly for a more comfortable climbing position.

## 7 CLIPS OR FLATS

We always recommend that riders who are looking to improve their technical skills use flat pedals. They promote better technique for new riders and make it easier to bail if things go wrong. If you're using clips for trail riding, look for a pedal with a good supportive platform and adjust the cleat so it's towards the rear of your shoe. This is how good flat pedal riders position their feet so they can relax and balance better when they stand up.

# CLIMBING

Having a good body position in combination with managing your power output can make long climbs more manageable and short snappy climbs possible. The aim is to balance your weight between the front and rear wheels, so you have traction at the rear and maintain a bit of weight on the front wheel to stop it lifting or wandering.

### ● GET LOW

Lower your chest towards the handlebar, move your hips forward on the saddle, tuck your elbows in and look up. If your hands feel light and you're not hanging off the bar you're probably in the right place. Getting your chest low will keep some weight on your front wheel so you can maintain your steering.



### ● SIT OR STAND?

In most cases it's more efficient to sit, but you may want to stand for a break or if you need to put more power down. On rough terrain hover just above your normal seated position so you can absorb bumps and the bike can move around underneath you.

### ● MANAGING POWER

It's important not to burn yourself out quickly, so relax and try to maintain a good average power output for the whole climb, rather than sprinting and then freewheeling. You'll need to carry as much momentum as possible into short, steep climbs, so make sure you put the power down early.

### ● GEAR SELECTION

On long climbs, aim to spin your legs for better efficiency. If you need extra traction on loose terrain, overgear by using a higher gear so you don't spin out. Stamping hard on the pedals in a high gear will tire you out quickly.

**• LOOK AHEAD**

Look as far ahead as you can down the trail to spot obstacles in good time. Lifting your head will help you do this.

**• BEND YOUR ELBOWS**

Bent elbows make you ready to absorb hits and manipulate the bike. Don't overbend or you'll run out of arm travel.

**• KEEP HEELS DOWN**

Dropping your heels gives you more control – your bike is pushed into your feet, putting more weight on your pedals.

**• STAY LOOSE**

The looser you feel on the bike, the more relaxed you become. This helps you absorb hits with your elbows and knees, which lets the bike track the terrain.

**• COVER YOUR BRAKES**

Powerful brakes help you stop with ease. One finger on each lever is enough and won't compromise your grip on the bar.

# DOWNHILL

The core principles of your basic body position remain largely the same when riding downhill. Effectively the front wheel has pitched away from you, so you need to lower your chest in order to keep bent elbows, which lets the bike move around. The most important thing is to keep your heels down and your core mass over your feet. Do this by moving your hips back towards the rear tyre.



# BRAKING

Braking effectively and at the right time will help you ride smoother and maintain speed. Use both brakes smoothly and equally, on the whole, to control your speed. When you brake your body position will move forwards and on to the bar, so counteract this by dipping your heels. Avoid constantly dragging your brakes because your suspension won't work effectively and you won't be able to stay loose.

**• LOOK FOR TRACTION**

Spot grippy surfaces to brake on. Try to avoid braking on loose and slippery terrain because it'll unbalance you.

**• STAY SMOOTH**

Braking affects your body position and suspension, so try to brake before technical or rough sections of trail if you want to ride smoother.

**• BRAKE STRAIGHT**

Scrub your speed before corners, when you can brake in a relatively straight line. Try not to brake around corners because it'll prevent you from leaning the bike.

# COMING UP

**ISSUE 319  
CORE SKILLS**

Master the manual and rear wheel lift. Learn to bunnyhop and wheelie  
On sale 24 July

**ISSUE 320  
GAIN SPEED**

How to hit corners and berms more effectively and not lose speed!  
On sale 21 August

**ISSUE 321  
GET AIR**

Improve your jump skills on everything from tabletops to drops  
On sale 18 September

**ISSUE 322  
TECHNICAL RIDING**

How to stay in control when the terrains starts to get tough  
On sale 16 October

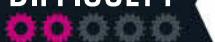


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# Grimetime

## DIFFICULTY



### CRANKBROS MALLETS PEDAL SERVICE

TIME 20 minutes

COST £13-£15 for rebuild kit  
(price varies by pedal model)

Follow this step-by-step guide  
to remove any play from your  
CrankBrothers platform pedals



**01** Remove both pedals from your bike using an 8mm Allen key. The driveside pedal is conventionally threaded – turn it anticlockwise to unscrew it. The non-driveside pedal is reverse threaded – turn it clockwise to unscrew it. Next, use a large flat-bladed screwdriver to remove the end cap from the first pedal, turning it anticlockwise. Discard the end cap.



**02** Place an 8mm socket over the nut at the outer end of the pedal spindle and attach a socket wrench. Insert an 8mm Allen key into the inner (crank) end of the pedal spindle. With the Allen key in one hand and the socket wrench in the other, turn the socket wrench anticlockwise to remove the spindle nut, then slide the pedal body off the spindle.



**06** Now to remove the inner bearing, which will either be a needle bearing (Mallet 3/DH) or a bushing (Mallet 1/2). Sit the outside edge of the inner part of the pedal body on a workbench. Stand one end of the push rod on the middle of the bearing/bushing. Tap the other end of the push rod straight down with a rubber mallet until the bearing/bushing is pushed out.



**07** Discard the bearing/bushing. Wipe all grease out of the interior of the pedal body using a workshop rag or paper towel. Take an O-ring from the bag in the pedal rebuild kit labelled Candy and install it in the outer part of the pedal body. Install a second O-ring in the inner part of the pedal body.



**08** Take the two plastic bushings out of the bag labelled Candy. Push the shorter bushing into the outer part of the pedal body with your fingers. Push the longer bushing into the inner part of the pedal body with your fingers. Apply a small amount of grease to the bushings and O-rings.



**12** Flip the pedal body over and rest the outer part on the workbench. Place the new bushing or needle bearing over its bore, with the flat side with writing facing out. Place a 10mm socket over the bearing/bushing and tap it gently with a rubber mallet, ensuring that it stays aligned with the bore. Stop when the bearing/bushing is fully installed.



**13** Place the new seal (included in the pedal rebuild kit) on the pedal spindle, with the narrow side facing away from the crank end of the spindle, as shown. Stop when the seal is halfway on to the polished bearing surface in the middle of the spindle.



**14** Grease the spindle generously (except for the threads at the end) and insert it into the pedal body, starting from the end with the needle bearing or bushing (crank side). Push the spindle all the way through until the threads at the end protrude from the cartridge bearing at the outer (non-crank) end of the pedal body.



## Tools for the job Essential kit

- 1** Large flat-bladed screwdriver  
**2** Small flat-bladed screwdriver  
**3** Rubber mallet  
**4** 8mm and 10mm sockets  
**5** Socket wrench  
**6** Torque wrench  
**7** Grease  
**8** T25 Torx wrench  
**9** CrankBrothers pedal rebuild kit  
**10** Workshop rag or paper towel
- Not pictured**  
**11** 8mm Allen key  
**12** Ziptie  
**13** Pick



**03** Clean the spindle using degreaser and a rag/paper towel. Remove the seal from the spindle and discard it. Use a T25 Torx key to remove the two pedal body bolts, turning them anticlockwise. Put them somewhere clean and safe. Pull the two halves of the pedal body apart. Remove the wing/spring sleeve assembly and set it aside with the pedal body bolts.



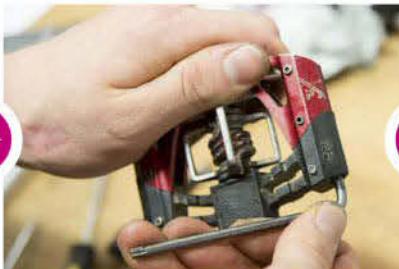
**04** Take the outer (non-crank side) half of the pedal body and use your fingernails – or a small flat-bladed screwdriver – to pick out the black plastic bushing housed in the central bearing bore. Then use your fingernails or a pick to pick out the O-ring. Repeat the process for the bushing and O-ring housed in the inner (crank side) half of the pedal body.



**05** Now to remove the cartridge bearing. Sit the outside edge of the outer half of the pedal body on a workbench. Stand one end of the push rod (included in the pedal rebuild kit) on the inner surface of the bearing. Tap the other end of the push rod straight down with a rubber mallet until the bearing is pushed out of the pedal body. Discard the bearing.



**09** Place the spring/wing assembly between the two parts of the pedal body, with the longer part of the sleeve towards the inner part of the pedal body. Use your hands to press the three components firmly together until they snap into place. The sleeve will align inside the bushings. Ensure the spring/wing assembly spins freely within the pedal body.



**10** Reinstall the two pedal body bolts, turning them clockwise with a T25 Torx key. Tighten them to 2.5Nm, or 6Nm for the Mallet DH/Race pedal. Be sure not to overtighten the bolts. Lightly grease the bearing/bushing surfaces on the inside of both ends of the pedal body.



**11** Rest the inner part of the pedal on the workbench. Place the new cartridge bearing (included in the pedal rebuild kit) over the bearing bore on the outside of the pedal. Stand one end of the push rod on the bearing and tap the other end with a rubber mallet, making sure the bearing stays aligned with the bore. Stop when the bearing is fully installed in the bore.



**15** Insert an 8mm Allen key into the crank end of the spindle. Screw the new spindle nut (included in the pedal rebuild kit) on to the threads at the other end of the spindle and turn it clockwise by hand a couple of turns. Install an 8mm socket on the spindle nut and use a torque wrench to tighten it to 4Nm, turning it clockwise.



**16** Install the new end cap using a flat-headed screwdriver, turning it clockwise. The main seal should be inserted 2mm into the pedal body. If not, push it in with a bent ziptie. Thread the pedal spindle into the crank arm. Use an 8mm Allen key to tighten it, turning it clockwise on the drive side and anticlockwise on the non-drive side. Repeat steps 1 to 16 on the opposite pedal.

## WORKSHOP WISDOM

Wet and muddy conditions take an inevitable toll on pedals, meaning that sooner or later they'll either develop play or start feeling gritty. The good news is that if you want to save yourself the time and cost of fully servicing your Mallets, it may be possible to extend their life without replacing the bearings.

Take your pedals apart, as explained above, but don't remove the bearings and bushings. Clean and degrease the internals, then apply generous quantities of grease. Rebuild the pedals as outlined above. Carrying out this procedure at the first sign of play could save you time and money in the long run.



# MBUK

YOUR PROBLEMS SOLVED BY OUR EXPERTS



You don't need a new freehub to fit a Shimano 11-speed cassette

**Q** I have a 2011 Giant Trance and still use the stock Kenda Nevegal tyres that came on the bike. The majority of my riding is at Cannock Chase, on the Follow the Dog and Monkey trails, which consist of a mixture of stone and sandy soil. Can you recommend a set of tyres that'll suit these conditions?

*Lee Campbell, Stafford*

**A** Cannock doesn't get particularly gloopy when it's wet, so a tyre like the Maxxis Ardent should do the job nicely up front. For all-round riding, we'd opt for the dual-compound, tubeless ready, EXO Protection version in the 2.4in width because it's not too weighty and can handle some rough treatment when clattering through stony sections of trail. If you're



A Maxxis Minion DHF will give you plenty of grip up front

looking for a touch more grip, slap a 2.35in Maxxis Minion DHF on. It's heavier and slower rolling but you'll be able to make the most of the predictable traction on offer.

At the rear, we'd go for something like the 2.2in Maxxis Ardent Race. It's light and fast rolling, with a less aggressive tread than the Ardent for improved rolling speed, but still comes with EXO Protection sidewalls to help fend off pesky punctures. ☀

**Q** I want to convert my 2010 Lapierre Spicy to 1x10. I've been reading up about various ways of doing this and keep coming across people mentioning the need to change the freehub body on my rear wheel. Do I really need to do this?

*Michael Partridge,  
Royal Tunbridge Wells*

**A** No. Chances are you've stumbled upon people talking about switching to one of SRAM's 1x11 transmissions, which require a special 'XD' freehub body to accommodate their super-wide 10-42t cassettes. For a 1x10 transmission, or even one of Shimano's new 1x11 set-ups, a standard freehub will work perfectly fine.

**Q** I'm keen to know more about setting my tyres up tubeless. Is it easy to convert or will I regret making the switch?  
*Lauren Blake, via email*

**A** A full tubeless conversion kit like that from Stan's NoTubes will set you back about £60 but if your wheels are tubeless ready you'll just need some valve stems, rim tape and liquid sealant (from £36 for the Stan's versions). The instructions are dead easy to follow and the procedure itself is pretty simple.

Once you get the knack of seating the tyre on the rim, adding sealant and getting the tyre inflated (and more importantly, staying up) going tubeless makes a lot of sense. You can run lower pressures for improved traction and there are no tubes to pinch-flat in rough sections. Most of us here at MBUK prefer to run tubeless.



## QUICK FIX MOUNTAIN BIKE TIPS

### How to temporarily patch a torn tyre



**01** Carefully remove the damaged tyre from the rim. Inspect the inside of the tyre until you locate the small tear in the sidewall or tread.



**02** Clean the area around the tear thoroughly. Use pliers to remove any debris that may have caused the tear. Cut out a thin piece of cardboard – it needs to be big enough to easily cover the tear while still sitting inside the tyre.



**03** Sit the cardboard on top of the tear and use duct tape to secure it in place. Be sure to use plenty of tape with a lot of overlapping layers to help reinforce the area around the tear.

## CONTACT US:

Write to: Ask MBUK, 2nd Floor, Tower House, Fairfax Street, Bristol  
Email: askmbuk@bikeradar.com Visit: www.mduk.com

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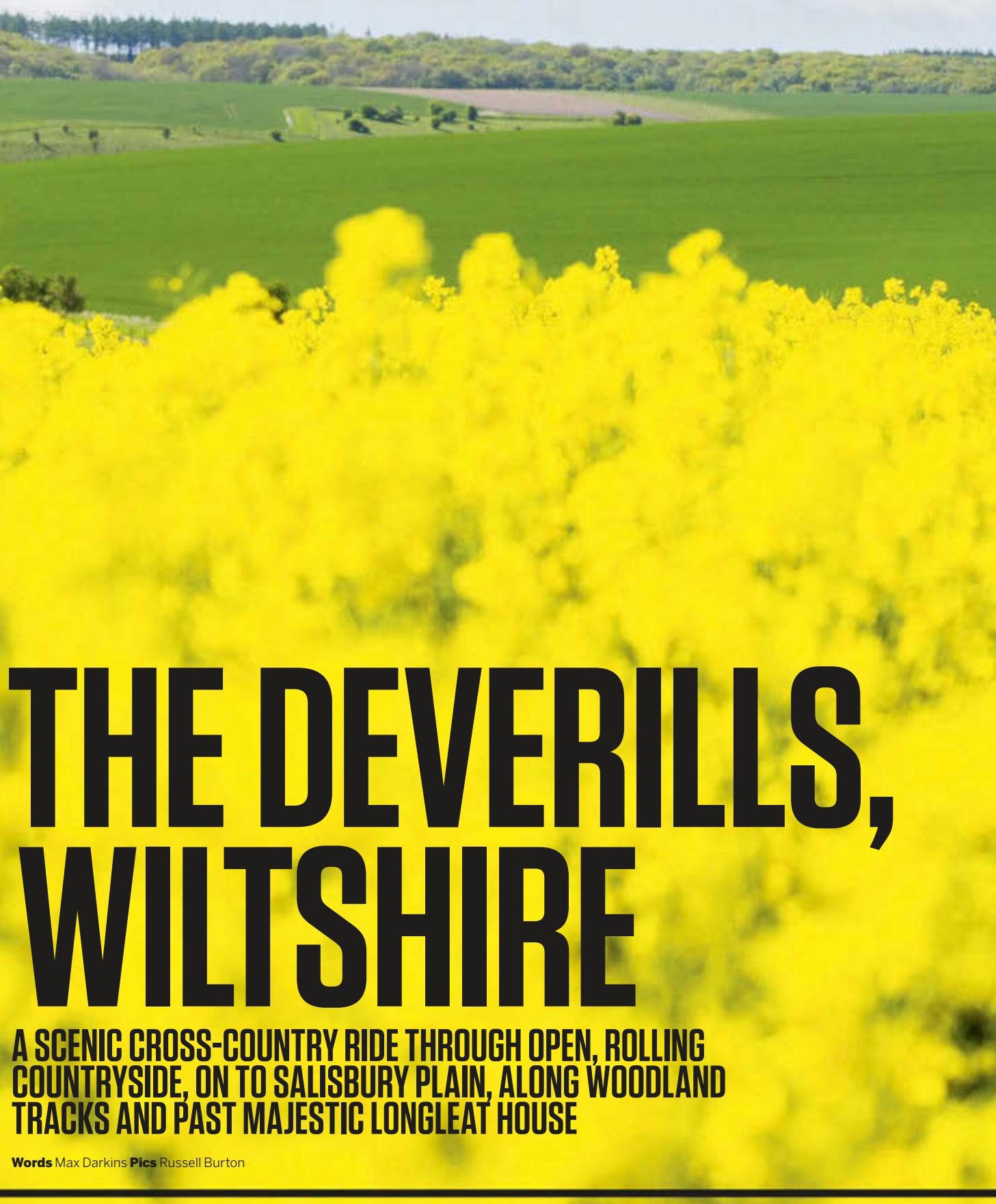


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# THE DEVERILLS, WILTSHIRE

A SCENIC CROSS-COUNTRY RIDE THROUGH OPEN, ROLLING  
COUNTRYSIDE, ON TO SALISBURY PLAIN, ALONG WOODLAND  
TRACKS AND PAST MAJESTIC LONGLEAT HOUSE

**Words** Max Darkins **Pics** Russell Burton

DOWNLOAD THE VIEWRANGER APP  
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MANUAL





Wiltshire terrain may not be exactly alpine but the rolling hills still give a good workout



Wilder things than bike trails lurk in these woods (behind a great big fence)



Don't turn around now Max, but it looks like you've got company

It's that time of year again when the countryside is alight with colour, and if there's anywhere in the UK that guarantees great views of rolling hills, bright yellow fields of oilseed rape and woodlands filled with bluebells, it's Wiltshire.

It's our photographer Russell's home stomping ground, and he's planned a variation of his local loop that takes in some fun woodland singletrack too. Joining us on today's ride is not-quite-so-local Anthony de Heveningham, who's been lured out to explore the Wiltshire hills for the first time. Anthony heads the Bristol Trails Group – a noble crew of volunteers who maintain the city's bike trails.

Starting from Shear Water car park, we head straight up a

short, steep hill into Foxholes Plantation. It's a harsh wake-up call for our cold limbs, but all is forgiven and forgotten when we peel off on to a fun, rooty track. Following Russell's wheel, we veer off left on to a skinny slither of singletrack as we start to descend. Our leader, on autopilot, has led us off the bridleway we're supposed to be riding and on to a path he's always ridden. A lot of the riding in the woods around here is like this – the trails aren't legal rights of way, but lots of people still use them, for walking as well as cycling. It's a whole can of worms...

### Sensory overload

At the bottom we hang a right and head alongside the A350, finally giving our legs the spin they need to warm up »

## THE LOWDOWN

THE DEVERILLS, WILTSHIRE



Wiltshire is a landlocked county in South West England that's home to rolling hills, chalky terrain and Salisbury Plain.  
[www.visitwiltshire.co.uk](http://www.visitwiltshire.co.uk)

## FINNED DISC BRAKE PADS

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### MODEL SHOWN

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Avid Elixir 7 Trail | Avid Elixir 9 Trail



Disc pad inserts feature our Race-Matrix compound which is higher friction coefficient than standard pads and delivers high levels of power, excellent modulation and pad life. Inserts now also available in sintered compound.

£13.99 per pair, or 2 pairs £24.99. Replaceable Race-Matrix disc brake pad inserts £8.99 per pair, or 4 pairs £29.99. Sintered inserts £6.99 per pair, or 4 pairs £22.99

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## BEAUTIFUL DAPPLED SUNLIGHT SHINES ON SUMPTUOUS, BLUEBELL LINED SINGLETRACK ON EITHER SIDE OF US



properly. Past Longbridge Deverill (one of several villages known as The Deverills situated along the River Wyle in Wiltshire), we enter the quiet Southleigh Woods where a worm raises its head from the can once more. The main track continues straight ahead, but beautiful dappled sunlight shines on sumptuous, bluebell lined singletrack on either side of us. Having recently ridden at high speed into a chest-level wire strung across a similar

trail in my local woods I'm cautious, but Russell knows of nothing that sinister ever happening here.

On the far side of the woods the singletrack between the trees and the adjacent field is totally legit and excellent fun. The undergrowth and stinging nettles have shot up in recent weeks with all the sun and rain, and they provide a sensory overload as we zip along the trail, not wanting to graze against the barbed wire fence that runs just inches from our knuckles at times.

Next, we cruise down to Sutton Veny and join some scenic back lanes and bridleways that lead us to the foot of the Salisbury Plain. The climb is easier work than it first looks, thanks to the decent track, and we're soon crossing the A350 and grinning, between gasps, at the top. The descent has to wait a while though, as Russell spots his prize — a track running straight through a field of »

### WHAT IS VIEWRANGER?



ViewRanger is an app that lets outdoor enthusiasts discover, plan, navigate and share their adventures on smartphones, on tablets and online. With offline mapping (including Ordnance Survey maps), turn-by-turn navigation and bike computer functions like ride time, ride distance and current, average and maximum speed, it'll turn your phone into a fully fledged GPS unit.

You can also use it to plan or download routes, access guidebook-style information, broadcast your location and track your friends. It has a social platform too, where you can store and share their adventures.

ViewRanger is used by more than 400 official bodies, including search-and-rescue teams in the UK and overseas.



The ViewRanger app is available to download for Apple, Android, BlackBerry 10, Kindle Fire and Symbian devices.

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England's yellow and pleasant land – fields of oilseed rape provide a feast for the senses



## I'M PETAL-DASHED FROM HEAD TO FOOT AND MY NEW WHITE GLOVES ARE NOW BRIGHT YELLOW WITH POLLEN

bright yellow rape. After the obligatory runs back and forth for the camera I glance down to see I'm petal-dashed from head to foot, including my bike. Also, to my horror, my new white gloves (I know it's a daft colour, but they match my helmet) are now bright yellow with pollen. "Look at the state of my gloves after that rape!" I bellow across the hill – only realising how dodgy that sounds when I see the expressions on my riding companions' faces.

### Singletrack safari

The flat-out descent to Brixton Deverill is a hoot in the dry, though somewhat slippery and scary when wet. The only downside is that the climb

back up the far side of the valley also has plenty of traction, so we've no excuse not to grind our way up to the next summit. Well, the false summit – a left turn off the main track highlights that there's still a lot further to go. The terrain around here is great for fast cross-country riding, but we opt for a gentle amble along the ridgetop to take in the spectacular views.

It's another fast descent off the top of the hill before we follow the next bridleway to Horningham, where we pick up a National Cycle Network route that goes straight down the Longleat House driveway. The stately home is a spectacular sight – and it's very good of the Marquess of

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This route is easy to follow. Just watch out in the woods, where unofficial trails branch off the main tracks, and steer clear of Longleat Forest, where bikes are no longer welcome



Bath to allow cyclists through (it's a permissive path).

Turning right by the house, we follow the long, sweeping driveway uphill to Longleat Forest, where a whole barrel load of worms has been spilled. Mountain bikers have long enjoyed the trails in this forest, with the Black Canon Collective cycling club even renting some land in King's Bottom at one point. But since the estate was passed from Lord Bath to his son Ceawlin, Viscount Weymouth, in 2010, things have changed. A more

businesslike approach, along with some vandalism, rubbish and trails being dug on historical sites, means mountain biking in the forest isn't really tolerated any more.

We therefore follow the NCN trail around the Centre Parcs perimeter fence and across the access road filled with queuing SUVs, before passing through Buckler's Wood. You can't fail to spot the singletrack through here, and there are lots more trails down towards Shear Water too, but the owners don't turn a blind eye to riding like they used to.

Once we've dropped down to Shear Water we sidle up to the cafe opposite the car park in search of refreshments, only to see the dreaded 'Closed' sign. After some forehead slapping and muttering of rude words, our wobbly legs get us back to the van and plan B, 'Bath Arms', is hatched. A short drive along the road and we're soon ensconced in the pub garden, drinking ale and reflecting on a very enjoyable old-school cross-country ride. ☀

**BEST EATING**

Bargate Thatched Cottage Tearooms at the start/end of the ride has friendly service and a good choice of refreshments – usually. It was closed on our visit so we went down the road to the Bath Arms in Crockerton. The staff were friendly and the food was just the ticket – we sampled a homemade fishfinger sandwich and a local ale while sat in garden. The log burner means the pub is welcoming in winter too, and they offer accommodation should you want to stay over ([www.batharmscrockerton.co.uk](http://www.batharmscrockerton.co.uk), 01985 212262)





# WRECKING *Mountain* *Biking*<sup>UK</sup> CREW

## Castlewellan, Northern Ireland

This forest park has proved the surprise hit of the recently developed Northern Irish trail centre network. We went to find out why...

Words Ric McLaughlin Pics Simon Nieborak

## THE LOWDOWN

Castlewellan, N. Ireland



**DISTANCE:** 19KM

**CLIMBING:** DECENT INITIAL EFFORT FOLLOWED BY SHORT SPIKES THROUGHOUT

**TIME:** 1.5-2 HOURS

**GRADING:** RED

### WHY RIDE HERE? It's

Northern Ireland's most popular trail centre, best enjoyed with a group of mates

### RAD...

- Flow – there's plenty of it
- 'Off the brakes' thrills in relative safety
- Quality pump track to finish up on

### BAD...

- Can be busy
- Not that technical



The red trail takes you right out into the hills, with views to die for

**A**s far as starts to a day's riding go, this one isn't bad. We're staying at the Hillyard House hotel in Castlewellan, and French toast and a 'healthy' (read grilled) Ulster fry-up are absorbing the previous night's Guinness a treat. The strong coffee fires our synapses into life and the heavy, black rain we arrived in has made way for crisp blue skies.

The small town itself is, weirdly, a lot like its trails, in that there's more going on than first impressions suggest. Many of the buildings date back to the 18th century and Castlewellan Castle is now a Christian conference centre. As photographer Simon Nieborak and I roll down the grand drive towards the house it's impossible not to be impressed by its beautiful setting on the shores of Castlewellan Lake.

The hillside that stretches up behind it hints at the

potential for gravity-induced fun. The tranquil air is promptly shattered by the arrival of Glyn O'Brien. The unofficial Lord Mayor of mountain biking in Northern Ireland greets six or so people we hadn't even seen until he arrived, before entertaining us with his tales of racing the European Singlespeed Champs, which were held here at Castlewellan earlier in the year. We start making noises about having to get riding.

### Fast company

The opening climb is typical of UK trail centres — a long, meandering fireroad that gets the blood pumping. We pause at the top to take in the view, which is serenely beautiful — the Mourne Mountains rise from a patchwork quilt of fields as the last of the morning's clouds hug the small towns and villages that dot the landscape.

We point the bikes downwards and I slot in

»

### The Wrecking Crew

Who are we?



GLYN O'BRIEN

Northern Irish racer Glyn is a former national DH champ



RIC MC LAUGHLIN

Ric enjoys roaming the Scottish plains by bike while munching pies



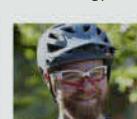
ROB WEAVER

Tech Ed Rob is a racer at heart but loves a bit of DH action



JAMES BLACKWELL

Five foot of trouble, Art Ed Jimmer rides quick and talks even quicker



OLLY FORSTER

Staff Writer Olly loves fast, challenging trails — and his cat, Precious



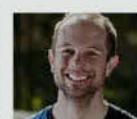
MATT ORTON

Deputy Art Ed Matt is our resident bearded, tattooed fatbike lover



JAKE COSTLEY-WHITE

Word wrangler JCW loves a sneaky slither of singletrack or two



ALEX EVANS

Features Ed Alex used to race DH and spent seven years in the Alps



JAKE IRELAND

Jake spends more time on two wheels than two feet



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# "THE NEXT BIT IS A ROCK GARDEN," GLYN WARNS. "JUST WATCH YOURSELF, AS IT'S PRETTY SLICK." HE'S NOT LYING



behind Glyn on the opening of the first red/black descent. The hardpack surface makes for fast going and there are plenty of ledges and rocks to pop off and gap. "The next bit is a rock garden," Glyn warns. "Just watch yourself, as it's pretty slick." He's not lying either.

## Slick slate

The trail is flat, so you can't muster much speed to carry through it, but glossed in moisture it feels incredibly greasy and it's a mental battle to stay loose and carry the bike through. The slickness is down to the slate used, which refuses to offer up any kind of traction. This is the black graded section. Despite the potential for going down like a deck of cards, it's not black by the standards of somewhere like BikePark Wales. It's more of a cautionary note than a 'you'll do well to get down this' number.

The Castlewellan trails were designed by Dafydd Davies and Andy Beavis and, as the golden light breaks through



The castle is right by the trails

the line of dense pine trees, it's an engrossing place to be. The trail cracks on and, while there's never really an obstacle that has my internal hazard lights flashing or gets my 150mm travel Scott in difficulty, there's no denying the fun factor. It's that effect that the best manmade trails achieve – places like Glentress and the aforementioned BPW. There's a feeling that you can just open up and go as fast as you want.

It's easy to see why this is a popular venue – families and groups of mates can enjoy it in equal measure. There's not much to have little Jimmy panic-skidding into the undergrowth, but at the same time there are plenty of turns »



## THE PRO GIVES US HIS VIEW

"Castlewellan is the most popular trail centre in Northern Ireland. With the high Mourne Mountains as a backdrop, the views from Slievenaslat and around Castlewellan Lake are nothing short of what you'd expect in the Alps. The trails are suitable for a good variety of skill levels, from beginner to intermediate, with the odd section of black thrown in for good measure. The coolest part, I think, is that you don't have any ball-breaker climbs, but there's plenty of fast, flowy singletrack and you still get the feeling of being right up there in the mountains. Also, if your mates turn up late there's a sweet pump track at the trailhead to kill time."

GLYN O'BRIEN PRO RACER AND COACH

## LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

### LOCALS DO...

- Bring whoever you want. There are trails for everyone here
- Go fast and smile a lot
- Finish the day with shady pump track transfers

### LOCALS DON'T...

- Litter. This is an outstandingly beautiful area used for a number of outdoor pursuits so don't go giving us all a bad name!

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The descents are good fun without being too technical



Castlewellan has a pump track at the trailhead

to push the bike into and scope for bigger, harder lines when you death-grip the handlebar.

Castlewellan hosted the opening round of the Vitus First Tracks Enduro Series earlier this year, and Glyn points out a few of the connecting trails he grafted on to the centre's best descents for the event. There was a lot of work to be done but the easy climbs and compact nature made for a great venue.

Glyn's spotted something, though – a pair of rollers that he reckons are actually a double. A couple of run-ins later and he feels the speed is there. Simon and I hold our collective breath. The main concern is a tree stump that overhangs the landing zone – hitting it would result in a certain and rapid disappearance into a group of fairly substantial trees

intermingled with jagged rock. Undeterred, Glyn hits the take-off, pulls up and promptly heads straight for the stump!

Looking at slow-mo phone footage later shows that even before he got his wheels back on the ground, Glyn was swivelling his hips around the stump. His front wheel missed it by centimetres and his quick thinking allowed his Nukeproof and legs to skim past it. It's very clearly time for some recovery Haribo, and a couple of gelatin treats later we roll out on to the rest of the trail. I hang up a gap into some rocks and the lake pops into view again.

### Bright star

When they were constructed, nearby Rostrevor was earmarked as the jewel in the crown of the Northern Irish trail centre network, but in fact it's Castlewellan that has shone the brightest. The key is its accessibility – it's an unintimidating climb with fast and fun trails at the top. It has everything you expect from a trail centre, and if you want a longer ride then the prospect of a second lap isn't unappealing. And, as Glyn proved, there are plenty of opportunities to kick things up a notch the more you get to know the trail. ☀

## THE DIRECTORY

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT CASTLEWELLAN

### GET THERE

Stena Line run daily sailings from Cairnryan to Belfast (or go from Holyhead to Dublin, then head north). From Belfast, drive south on the M1 towards Dublin. Come off at the Lisburn junction and follow the A49 through Ballynahinch before swapping on to the A24 through Clough. Use postcode BT31 9BU for sat-navs.

### FACILITIES

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### CONTACT

Mountain Bike NI  
[www.mountainbikeni.com](http://www.mountainbikeni.com)

### BIKE SHOPS

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02843 778029  
Mourne Cycles, Newcastle  
[www.mournecycles.co.uk](http://www.mournecycles.co.uk)

### WHAT ELSE IS NEARBY?

**Rostrevor (XC/DH)**  
The biggest of the Northern Irish trail centres has 27km of trails and incredible views.

**Barnett Demesne (XC)**

This micro trail network is 10 minutes from the ferry for riding in the heart of Belfast.

**Davagh Forest (XC)**

Davagh is an excellent counterpoint to Castlewellan with more technical, natural trails.

### VERDICT

We weren't sure what to expect from Castlewellan, but it came through for us in spades. It hasn't been over-thought or over-built – it's all about fast, flowing manmade trails built in an area filled with riding potential and set against a stunning backdrop





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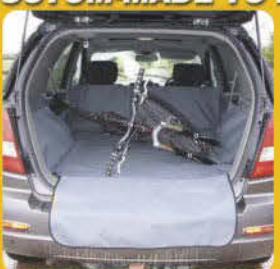
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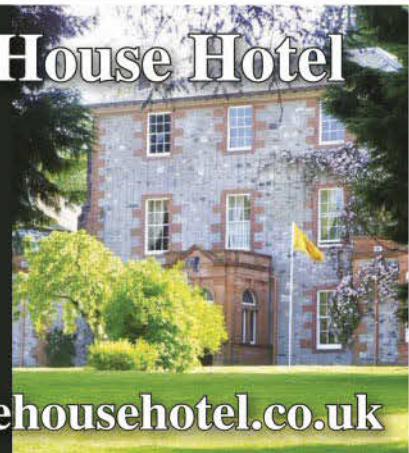
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MIAS meets the needs for structured training for those involved in leading mountain bike trips. The award has been operating throughout the UK and abroad, and has run many courses for the armed services in Kenya, Germany and Cyprus.

MIAS has been instrumental in the development of QCF Mountain Bike accreditation, working with the Awarding Body LAO. MIAS currently offers QCF/LAO Level 2 Award in Assisting Mountain Bike Activity Leadership and shortly QCF/LAO Level 3 Certificate in Mountain Bike Activity Leadership. These QCF MTB courses are available for other organisations to use.

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Photo : Dave Trumpe



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